

# Living on Borrowed Time

Opium in Canton, 1906–1936

Xavier Paulès

TRANSLATED BY  
Noel Castelino

CHINA RESEARCH MONOGRAPH 74

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Xavier Paulès, translated by Noel Castelino

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Xavier Paulès

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**Institute of  
East Asian Studies**  
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Cover image: A young man posing with opium paraphernalia, postcard, late-nineteenth century (Hong Kong, Daibatsu). Collection Mme. Régine Thiriez.

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To Chunyi



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# Romanization

The Chinese terms, names, and words used in this book have been transcribed according to the *pinyin* system, barring the following that follow older styles, either in line with usage or to preserve their original transcription in the sources:

Canton (*pinyin*: Guangzhou)

Honam: in *pinyin*, Henan (literally, South of the River). This term designates the huge island to the south of the Pearl River and by extension refers to that part of the Canton urban area that is attached to it (see maps 4 and 5). The name Henan happens to be an exact homonym of Henan Province, and it is to avoid confusion between the two that I have used the term Honam derived from the Cantonese pronunciation.

Hopei: in *pinyin*, Hebei (North of the River). Contrary to Honam, Hopei designates the part of Canton city situated to the north of the Pearl River. In the *pinyin* transcription, it is an exact homonym of Hebei Province, and it is to avoid confusion between the two that I have used the term Hopei derived, like Honam, from the Cantonese pronunciation.

Hong Kong (*pinyin* Xianggang)

Peking (*pinyin* Beijing)

Sun Yat-sen (Sun Zhongshan)

Tankas: in *pinyin*, *danjia*. This term designates the river-dwellers of the Pearl River. The origin of this community is unknown.

Jiang Jieshi: I have used the increasingly prevalent *pinyin* transcription (as opposed to Chiang Kai-shek and other variants). A similar rule has been followed for Nanking (Nanjing), Swatow (Shantou), and Pakhoi (Beihai).

Sun Yat-sen's son, who was the mayor of Canton on several occasions in the 1920s, is called Sun Ke (and not Sun Fo, as is sometimes the case).

# Currency and Weights

There is total confusion in the sources as to monies and currency. The widely prevalent reference to dollars (\$) gives no clue as to whether the currency in question is the central government currency, the provincial government's currency, or even the Hong Kong dollar, which was quite commonly used in Canton. Occasionally, the ambiguity is lifted by additional information, but such cases are few and far between. The term *yuan* 圓, used elsewhere in the sources, simply indicates that the currency being referred to is not the Hong Kong dollar.

This is why the currency unit used herein is always the one given by the source without any attempt to harmonize the different sources.

Whatever the unit of account (dollar or yuan), the *jiao* (or *hao*) represents one-tenth of the unit and the *fen* represents one hundredth.

As for weights, the situation is not much clearer, because the weight corresponding to the *liang* would vary, albeit moderately, from region to region. The following were the metric system equivalents of the units used by the Maritime Customs.

A *liang* 兩 (often called a *tael* or *ounce* in Western sources) was equivalent to 37.7 grams.

A *qian* 錢 (sometimes called a *mace*) was about one-tenth of a *liang*, or 3.78 grams.

A *dan* 擔 (sometimes called a *picul*) was the weight of one chest of opium, i.e., 60.5 kilograms.

A *jin* 斤 (pound) was equal to 16 *liang*, or about 600 grams.

# Abbreviations

Aix	Archives d'Outre Mer: Archives for Overseas Departments and Territories (they are kept in Aix en Provence)
CO	Colonial Office
CWR	<i>China Weekly Review</i>
FO	Foreign Office
GJJ	<i>Guangdong jinyan jikan</i> (Quarterly for the suppression of opium in Guangdong)
GJWGJ	<i>Guangzhoushi jinyan weiyuanhui gongzuo jiyao</i> (Summary of the activities of the Canton City Opium Suppression Office)
GJYN	<i>Guangzhoushi jieyan yiyuan nianbao</i> (Annual report on the Canton detoxification clinic)
GGI	Gouvernement général de l'Indochine (Government-General of Indochina)
GMR	<i>Guangzhou minguo ribao</i> (Canton republican daily)
MAE	Ministère des Affaires Etrangères (Ministry of Foreign Affairs: this term by extension designates the holdings of archives kept at the Quai d'Orsay in Paris)
Nantes	Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs kept at Nantes
NAOA	National Anti-Opium Association (Zhonghua guomin juduhui)
SCMP	<i>South China Morning Post</i>
SDN/LON	Société des Nations/League of Nations (by extension, this term designates the holdings kept in Geneva)
XGR	<i>Xianggang gongshang ribao</i> (Hong Kong industry and commerce daily)
YHB	<i>Yuehuabao</i>



# Introduction

The poppy plant, from which opium is extracted, has been known in China from early times. Even though the question of its provenance may be moot, most historians believe that the poppy was introduced by Arab merchants during the Tang dynasty (618–907). *Papaver somniferum* entered the Chinese pharmacopeia as early as the tenth century. In the centuries that followed, poppy pods and seeds became an ingredient in numerous remedies. The poppy, with its beautiful flower, was also appreciated as an ornamental plant.<sup>1</sup>

“Opium” (*yapian*) is the name of the substance obtained after the sap tapped through incision of the pods has been put through a few simple processes. The term appeared at the beginning of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), again in the context of medicinal use.<sup>2</sup> Consumption for pleasure dates from the seventeenth century, when *madak*—opium mixed with tobacco—came to be used by Chinese communities in what is today Indonesia. It was at the same time that *madak* gradually entered China, probably via Taiwan, but very little is known about its spread, which came about at the beginning of the Qing dynasty (1644–1912).<sup>3</sup>

The practices of opium consumption made familiar in the West by an abundance of illustrations and texts, that is, the consumption of pure opium without added tobacco, using the characteristic long-stemmed pipe

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<sup>1</sup> Yangwen Zheng, “The Social Life of Opium in China, 1483–1999,” *Modern Asian Studies* 37, no. 1 (2003): 4–8; Su Zhiliang, *Zhongguo dupin shi* [History of narcotics in China] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1997), 32–35; Frank Dikötter, Lars Laamann, and Zhou Xun, *Narcotic Culture: A History of Drugs in China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 75–78.

<sup>2</sup> Su Zhiliang, *Zhongguo dupin shi*, 36–37.

<sup>3</sup> On this question, the available sources are as scanty as they are imprecise: Jonathan Spence, “Opium,” in *Chinese Roundabout: Essays in History and Culture* (New York: Norton, 1992), 231–232; Dikötter, *Narcotic Culture*, 16–21 and 36–37; Wang Hongbin, *Jindu shijian* [History of the prohibition of drugs] (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1997), 15–27.

and lamp, appeared only in the following century.<sup>4</sup> At this time, the drug was restricted to the empire's political and economic elites.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, opium was being imported from India by British merchants, and its spread was no longer a trivial matter. The local authorities turned a blind eye to the illegal traffic organized in southern China's great port of Canton, then the only port open to foreigners. In 1839, alarmed by massive exports of silver used to pay for opium purchases, the emperor decided on a policy of firmness against the traffickers. The famous Qing official Lin Zexu, sent to Canton to put an end to the opium traffic, confiscated all the stocks of the British merchants in Canton. The spectacular destruction of these stocks in June 1839 became the *casus belli* for the first "Opium War" (1839–1842) between China and Great Britain. British military superiority proved to be overwhelming and, in a succession of unequal treaties signed at the end of the war, China was forced to open a number of ports to foreign trade. It was there that Indian opium, among other commodities, was unloaded during the following decades.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, China began to cultivate its own poppy crops on an extensive scale. Some twenty years after the first Opium War, Chinese opium, which was less costly but of a constantly improving quality, began to seriously compete with British imports. In the 1890s, the quantities of opium produced in the empire gradually and definitively overtook those imported from India. The robustness of the supply and the fall in price meant that the use of opium as a narcotic began to spread to every level of society.

The scale of opium consumption led the imperial authorities in 1906, after half a century of inaction, to adopt a policy of gradual elimination of both cultivation and consumption of the drug: this was the Ten-Year Plan. This domestic initiative was underpinned by diplomatic successes: the empire reached agreements with the British in 1907 and 1911 that stipulated annual decreases in the imports of Indian opium. The plan proved to be an indisputable success, much to the surprise of Western observers who had been highly skeptical at the time of its launch.

The 1911 Revolution, which ushered in the Republican era (1912–1949), thus erupted at a time when the successful eradication of opium was within reach. However, the rapid collapse of central authority in the mid-1910s and the emergence in its place of the notorious "warlords" (*junfa*) prevented this goal from being attained. Both production and consumption now saw a major revival. While the need to resume the policy of opium elimination continued to be a constant theme, the *junfa* depended far too much

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<sup>4</sup> Dikötter, Laamann, and Xun, *Narcotic Culture*, 37–38; Wang Hongbin, *Jindu shijian*, 17–23.

on the income generated by the narcotic trafficking circuits to give serious thought to prohibition. The only real attempt in this direction came about in 1934 under the Six-Year Plan inaugurated by the Guomindang a few years after it had managed to subdue the main warlords (1926–1928) and reunify China, albeit imperfectly. The Six-Year Plan hinged on the gradual elimination of opium by taxation and state monopoly combined with the registration and detoxification of smokers. Every year, a proportion of the registered smokers had to give up the drug, while the surface area of lands planted with poppy also diminished proportionately. The Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945) seriously jeopardized the Guomindang's capacity to carry out its plan and extinguished any glimmer of hope that might have come in the wake of some initial encouraging results. It was only at the beginning of the 1950s, after the Communist victory, that opium was finally eradicated.

This very brief survey of the history of opium in China suggests that the Republican period was an interlude between two eras when consumption fell, one period that was significant but temporary, while the other was complete and definitive. This noteworthy fact leaps to mind when opium is studied from a long-term perspective, but it has not been highlighted in existing historical works. This observation also begs the question of whether the Republic saw a simple return to the pre-1906 conditions. Can we suppose that the success of the Ten-Year Plan was nothing more than a parenthesis? The historians of Communist China, ever willing to blacken the Republican record and highlight Communist successes, have a ready answer. Many of them assert, quite gratuitously, that conditions under the Republic were even worse than they had been before 1906.<sup>5</sup> The fact is that it is impossible today to answer this question simply because absolutely no interest has been shown in consumption.

This lack of interest stems from the perspective adopted in most studies on the history of opium in China. Broadly speaking, current research follows three main approaches: diplomatic, political, and, to a considerably lesser extent, social.

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<sup>5</sup> Su Zhiliang, *Zhongguo dupin shi*, 334; Zhu Qingbao, Jiang Qiuming, and Zhang Shijie, *Yapian yu jindai Zhongguo* [Opium and contemporary China] (Nanjing: Jiangsu jiaoyu chubanshe, 1995), 197; Wang Hongbin, *Jindu shijian*, 378; Wang Jinxiang, "Guangzhou minguo zhengfu yapian zhengce tanlue" [A brief look at the opium policies of the Canton Republican Government], *Shanxi shidaxuebao* [Bulletin of the Shanxi Normal University] 24, no. 4 (1997): 56. They at least point to the profound changes at work under the Republic: new drugs were emerging, mainly morphine and heroin, and in certain regions of China they were beginning to compete seriously with opium.

To begin with, as far as the nineteenth century is concerned, it is Lin Zexu's action and the Opium Wars that take the lion's share of all Chinese works on the subject. Chinese historians of this period have never looked at opium consumption in its social dimension and have identified the penetration of opium with imperialistic policies of the European powers, especially Great Britain.<sup>6</sup> The forced introduction of opium is likened to a deliberate enterprise of poisoning (*duhua zhengce*) in which the roles are very conveniently apportioned—the British imposing their poison at bayonet point on a China presented as the manifest victim of a criminal trade. No attention is actually paid to the scale and the consequences of the penetration of opium, considered without reflection to be disastrous. In current Chinese research, the impact of opium is measured only by the number of chests imported and the outflows of silver that paid for them. Opium is thus reduced to an avatar of imperialism, so to speak.

While Western historians are less concerned with condemning imperialism, they too have extensively dealt with the Opium Wars, especially between 1950 and 1970, when abundant research was devoted to this question.<sup>7</sup> The fact remains though that, ultimately, for both Western and Chinese historians of nineteenth-century China, the "history of opium" actually means "diplomatic history."

Opium in the twentieth century is a very different field of study. To begin with, Chinese historiography is far less comfortable with this period and in fact far less prolific. This is not surprising, since the opium consumed in China was no longer imported from India but produced in

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<sup>6</sup> A list follows of the main published works on opium that characterize the Chinese historiography. The first two stand out by their quality: Zhu, Jiang, and Zhang, *Yapian yu jindai Zhongguo*; Wang Hongbin, *Jindu shijian*; Su Zhiliang, *Zhongguo dupin shi*; Ma Mozhen, *Dupin zai Zhongguo* [Drugs in China] (Taipei: Yiqiao chubanshe, 1996); Li Bingxin, Xu Junyuan, and Shi Yuxin, eds., *Jindai Zhongguo yandu xiezhen* [A brief look at opium and narcotics in contemporary China] (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 1997); Qing Ling and Qin Shao, eds., *Cong Humen xiaoyan dao dangdai Zhongguo jindu* [From the destruction of opium in Humen to the prohibition of the drug in contemporary China] (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1997); Liu Fujing and Wang Mingkun, *Jiu Guangdong yandu chang* [Prostitution, gambling, and opium in old-time Canton] (Hong Kong: Zhonghua shuju youxian gongsi, 1992); Wu Zhaoqi, *Fuling yapian bainian kao* [Inquiry into a century of opium in Fuling] (Chongqing: Xinan shifan daxue chubanshe, 1999).

<sup>7</sup> Four works representative of the abundant literature devoted to the question follow: David Owen, *British Opium Policy in China and India* (reprint, London: Archon Books, 1968; 1st ed., New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1934); Arthur Waley, *The Opium War through Chinese Eyes* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1958); Hsin-pao Chang, *Commissioner Lin and the Opium War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964); Maurice Collis, *Foreign Mud: The Opium Imbrolio in the 1830's and the Anglo-Chinese War* (New York: Norton, 1968).



the country's southwestern provinces.<sup>8</sup> There are still avenues that Chinese historians can take to return to the issue of imperialism, pointing with some justification to the ways in which the foreign settlements and extraterritorial rights were a stumbling block in the path of Chinese efforts against opium consumption.<sup>9</sup> However, it is above all the opium-trafficking activities of the Japanese in the areas that they occupied that hold the attention of Chinese research scholars. In this view, Japan inherits the mantle of Britain as the country seeking to poison China.<sup>10</sup> While this aspect is typical of the focus of research on the nineteenth century in which the history of opium and that of imperialism are seen to converge, Chinese research on the twentieth century has focused on other facets. Opium first of all is a major preoccupation, along with prostitution and gambling, in the very somber descriptions of the warlord and Guomindang periods.<sup>11</sup> As a provender of resources to the warlords, opium is also seen as an essential player in the baneful process of political fragmentation that beset China in the second and third decades of the twentieth century.<sup>12</sup> Nor has Chinese research overlooked the nationwide anti-opium policies of 1906

<sup>8</sup> In the 1920s, China became the world's biggest producer of poppies and largely consolidated this position in the following decade: Ma Mozhen, *Dupin zai Zhongguo*, 104–105. According to Su Zhiliang, China alone produced a fifth or sixth of the world's opium at the beginning of the 1930s (*Zhongguo dupin shi*, 326).

<sup>9</sup> Zhu, Jiang, and Zhang, *Yapian yu jindai Zhongguo*, 295–303; Su Zhiliang, *Zhongguo dupin shi*, 274–275.

<sup>10</sup> In June 2001, a group of Chinese specialists met in a seminar that highlighted Japan's predominant influence and involvement in opium traffic in the twentieth century; cf. Wang Hongbin, "Jindu wenti yu jindai Zhongguo xueshu taolun hui zongshu" [Proceedings of the scientific seminar on the problem of the fight against drugs in contemporary China], *Jindaishi yanjiu* [Research on contemporary history] 1 (2002): 292–299. Two characteristic examples of this type of literature: Cao Dachen and Zhu Qingbao, *Cidaoxia de duhuo* [Poisoned at bayonet point] (Fuzhou: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 2005); Li Enhua, "Ribei zai Huanan de fandu huodong, 1937–1945" [Opium trafficking activities by Japan in southern China, 1937–1945], *Bulletin of the Institute of Modern History* [Academia Sinica (Taiwan)] 31 (1999): 135–165.

<sup>11</sup> Zhu, Jiang, and Zhang, *Yapian yu jindai Zhongguo*, 107–150; Su Zhiliang, *Zhongguo dupin shi*, 248–293; Wang Jinxiang, "Sanshi niandai guonei yapian wenti" [The problem of opium in China in the twenties and the thirties], *Minguo dang'an* [Archives of the Republic] 2 (1992): 71–76; Wang Hongyu, Cui Yuqiu, and Xing Zhonghua, *Minguo yanduchang* [Opium, gambling, and prostitution during the Republican period] (Changchun: Shidai wenyi chubanshe, 1993). This applies not only to studies on opium but also to almost every study dealing more generally with this period: see, for example, Xu Qingpu and Zhang Fuji, eds., *Jinxiandai Zhongguo shehui* [Modern and contemporary Chinese society] (Jining: Jilushu chubanshe, 2002), 269–270; Zhao Yinglan, *Minguo shenghuo lüeying* [A brief look at life during the Republican period] (Shenyang: Shenyang chubanshe, 2002), 185–200.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Ma Mozhen, *Dupin zai Zhongguo*, 105–107; Su Zhiliang, *Zhongguo dupin shi*, 248–293.

and 1934.<sup>13</sup> Clearly, then, Chinese research on the opium question in the twentieth century is also engaged with the relationship between internal politics and opium.<sup>14</sup>

That said, it is contemporary American scholars who must take credit for an original approach to the relationship between opium and the political situation during this period. Some have shown how the appropriation of opium revenues was a central element of the Guomindang's strategy in its project of national reunification.<sup>15</sup> Others have more extensively examined the affirmation of state power and the legitimacy of the state in the twentieth century in light of the various anti-opium campaigns.<sup>16</sup>

These two approaches, one centered mainly on the nineteenth century, emphasizing diplomacy and the theme of imperialism, and the other asking questions about the relationships between internal politics and opium in the twentieth century, have one feature in common. To borrow the terminology of economics, both approaches have, in similar ways, focused on the *supply side*, that is to say, the procurement and distribution of opium, rather than the *demand side* (consumption), which has continued to be been a blind spot in the research. Opium smokers,<sup>17</sup> their representa-

<sup>13</sup> Zhu, Jiang, and Zhang, *Yapian yu jindai Zhongguo*, 336–346, 375–409; Wang Hongbin, *Jindu shijian*, 268–328, 407–445.

<sup>14</sup> This presentation is a necessary simplification and does not do justice to research by a number of Taiwan scholars who have dealt with the question of opium from different perspectives. See, for example, Chen Yongfa on the use of opium revenues by the Chinese Communist Party and Lin Manhong on taxation and opium prices: Chen, “Hong taiyang xia de yingsuhua: Yapian maoyi yu Yan’an moshi” [Poppy flowers under a red sun: Opium trading and the Yan’an path], *Xinshixue* [Studies in new history] 1, no. 4 (December 1990): 40–115; Lin, “Qingmo benguo yapian zhitidai jinkou yapian (1858–1906)” [The replacement of imported opium in late-Qing China (1858–1906)], *Bulletin of the Institute of Modern History* [Academia Sinica] 9 (1980): 385–452.

<sup>15</sup> Edward R. Slack Jr., *Opium, State, and Society: China's Narco-Economy and the Guomindang, 1924–1937* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001); Alan Baumler, *The Chinese and Opium under the Republic: Worse than Floods and Wild Beasts* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007); see also Yiming Dong, “Étude sur le problème de l'opium dans la région du Sud-ouest de la Chine pendant les années 1920 et 1930” [Study on the problem of opium in southwest China during the years 1920 and 1930], Ph.D. thesis, EHESS, 1997.

<sup>16</sup> Yongming Zhou, *Anti-Drug Crusades in Twentieth-Century China: Nationalism, History, and State Building* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999); R. Bin Wong, “Opium and Modern Chinese State-Making,” in Timothy Brook and Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi, eds., *Opium Regimes: China, Britain, and Japan, 1839–1952* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 189–211; Judith Wyman, “Opium and the State in Late-Qing Sichuan,” in Brook and Wakabayashi, *Opium Regimes*, 212–227. I can also mention J. Madancy's masterful work on the Ten-Year Plan and its implementation in Fujian Province: Joyce Madancy, *The Troublesome Legacy of Commissioner Lin, 1820s to 1920s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

<sup>17</sup> This study will avoid the use of the term “opium addict” to designate all opium consumers. As we shall see, likening every consumer without exception to an addict was actu-

tions, the places in which they smoked, the paraphernalia that they used, and the place taken up by opium in their budget raise questions about consumption that have almost never been dealt with until now.

Research abhors a vacuum. A third approach has emerged, having first seen light in an article by R. K. Newman in 1995.<sup>18</sup> Newman proposed to revise the apocalyptic picture of opium and its ravages, although he himself swung a little too much to the other extreme. Other publications have followed, seeking a clearer picture of the demand side of this topic.<sup>19</sup>

However, almost all these studies that have inaugurated a social history of opium have remained at a very general level.<sup>20</sup> They speak of consumption “in China” within a very loose chronological framework, picking out examples from one place or another even though it is clear that there were huge contrasts between regions in the matter of opium consumption.<sup>21</sup> There were variations especially between the provinces. There was a sharp cleavage between the poppy-producing provinces, lands of plenty where opium was overabundant and very cheap, and provinces like Guangdong or Jiangsu where poppy hardly grew and where the narcotic arrived after lengthy journeys that considerably added to its price. Even within one and the same province, conditions in the big cities were probably quite different from what they were in the remote countryside. Opium consumption therefore simply cannot be approached in such general terms.

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ally one of the devices of disqualification used by the detractors of opium. The term opium addict will therefore be used only in its strictest sense to qualify a person identified as being dependent on opium.

<sup>18</sup> R. K. Newman, “Opium Smoking in Late Imperial China: A Reconsideration,” *Modern Asian Studies* 29, no. 4 (October 1995): 765–794.

<sup>19</sup> Dikötter, Laamann, and Xun, *Narcotic Culture*; Yangwen Zheng, *The Social Life of Opium in China* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Keith McMahon has published some work on the representation of opium in literary works: “Opium and Sexuality in Late Qing Fiction,” *Nannü [Masculine/Feminine]* 2, no. 1 (2000): 129–179; *The Fall of the God of Money: Opium Smoking in Nineteenth-Century China* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002). Virgil Ho too evokes the question: *Understanding Canton: Rethinking Popular Culture in the Republican Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 95–149.

<sup>20</sup> An excellent example is Edward Slack’s hapless foray into the subject of consumption in a chapter titled “The Effects of Opium on Chinese Society” (*Opium, State, and Society*, 34–49). Otherwise, Chinese studies on this subject, all from a national perspective (except for Wu Zhaodi’s work: *Fuling yapiian bainiankao*), unflinching fall into the same trap even when they make only a small reference to this question.

<sup>21</sup> This is one of the weaknesses of Dikötter’s otherwise very interesting book. For example, in his chapter on the myth of the opium house, he relies on firsthand accounts dealing with very different places and periods: Peking in the 1930s, Hangzhou under the late Qing, Changchun in the 1930s, and even postwar Bangkok: Dikötter, Laamann, and Xun, *Narcotic Culture*, 65–68.

Nor do the sources available for the study of opium consumption encourage any all-China approach. The diplomatic and official sources that have served for studies on diplomatic and political matters are not generally of great help here. There was no Chinese administration whose publications or archives could be used to shed sufficiently reliable light on the opium question at the national level. The associations that fought for the elimination of opium cannot fill this gap either. Thus, the figures proffered by the main body of this kind (the National Anti-Opium Association) belong to the realm of statistical fantasy and should not even be cited.<sup>22</sup> This paucity of sources does not mean that the social study of opium consumption should be abandoned. Still, before attempting to get a clear picture of the problem for China as a whole, this question must first be approached at the more modest level of a major Chinese city. This approach is sustainable because there exist veritable storehouses of materials that are both consistent and sufficiently extensive, allowing us to draw a portrait of the smokers and their social practices while offering a clear enough view of the context in which opium consumption took place, and especially of locally established regulatory systems.

The city of Canton offers abundant documentary resources to the scholar who has reached this heuristic conclusion—provided of course that he can display some imagination in his quest,<sup>23</sup> a point demonstrated by Virgil Ho's interesting article on the opium question in his pioneering work *Understanding Canton*. Still Ho, like other scholars on the subject of opium and the issues surrounding it, is concerned above all with challenging the received view of opium as a social scourge. Given that this approach leads him to constantly oppose the orthodox view presented by Chinese historians of Canton, Ho's work tends to remain at a somewhat superficial level. This is especially clear when he evokes the political context only to illustrate the Guomindang's duplicity under Sun Yat-sen, when it controlled the city at the beginning of the 1920s.<sup>24</sup>

The truth is that Virgil Ho's work, stimulating as it is, shows that simply pointing to a lack of interest—already emphasized here—in studying

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<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless, Su Zhiliang, in *Zhongguo dupin shi* (p. 333), reproduces without comment fairy-tale figures from an inquiry by the National Anti-Opium Association on the proportion of Chinese smokers between the ages of thirty and fifty: 61.7% in 1928 and 36% in the following year. The worthlessness of the NAOA data is explained in chapter 7 of my dissertation: Xavier Paulès, "L'opium à Canton, 1912-1937: Essais de mainmise politique et pratiques sociales," Ph.D. thesis, Lyons University II, 2005, 408-409.

<sup>23</sup> For details of the sources used, see the note on sources at the end of this book.

<sup>24</sup> Ho, *Understanding Canton*, 95-149.

demand and hoping to correct this state of affairs in some relevant fashion through an albeit interesting monograph on a city cannot take the place of an in-depth examination of the problems and issues involved. Clearly, there is no point in purely and simply opposing the supply-centered approach, since it would be entirely counterproductive to overlook the political aspect that provided a framework for opium consumption. On the contrary, and this is my stance, these two aspects of the question (supply and demand) must complement and illuminate each other so that the question of opium can be considered from every conceivable angle. To be sure, it is the politics of supply that set the conditions for the demand. The distribution circuits and the regulations imposed by the authorities defined the daily conditions in which opium was consumed. For example, the prohibition of smoking in certain places, the requirement (or nonrequirement) of possessing a permit, and retail prices are all factors that directly resulted from official policies and greatly influenced the penetration of opium into society. Besides, the anti-opium discourse that accompanied every policy of the day (even those that legalized the opium circuits) found a wide audience among the population. The population, and especially its elites, was receptive to the idea that taking opium was a shameful act with a negative effect on the destiny of the country. This existing situation obviously affected the development of the population of smokers in terms of their numbers as well as their social level.

Conversely, a better knowledge of the “smokers’” circles can provide a better grasp of the ups and downs of opium policy. Thus, the mental relationship of smokers with their narcotic, like their attachment to smoking in groups, sheds light on certain aspects that appear, on the face of it, to be paradoxical. For example, while the Canton authorities were generally inclined to make opium consumption as invisible as possible, they were forced in the mid-1920s to accept the official reopening of the opium houses. This decision to provide an alternative to home consumption, which, after all, gave a guarantee of discretion, can be explained by silent and relentless pressure from the smokers, who were unswervingly attached to their habits of group consumption (and therefore even prepared to flock in large numbers to the clandestine opium houses). Again, the extent to which the study of the politics of supply must rely on knowledge of the smokers can be seen from the competition that prevailed between the legal and the clandestine circuits of opium. No analysis of this competition can be made without knowledge of the actual conditions in which the consumers made their choices between the lawful circuits and the circuits of smuggled opium and clandestine opium houses. Two elements (among others) indispensable to defining this “horizon of choices” are the

costliness of legally sold opium in relation to the smoker's budget and the list of advantages and drawbacks of morphine-based and heroin-based illegal drugs compared with opium.

Rather than Canton, this study could have dealt with Shanghai, Tianjin, or Wuhan, for which it could have, perhaps, made use of a far greater wealth of documents. The abundance of studies on these cities (and especially Shanghai) is due not to chance but to the mass of archives and statistics available because of the weighty presence of the foreign settlements. However, this abundance comes at a rather high price, because the division of these cities into zones of different administrative statuses means that there are no statistics available that cover the entire urban space.<sup>25</sup> In Canton, on the contrary, the French and British settlements lacked economic importance and dynamism, occupying only the islet of Shamian, which amounted to an insignificantly small area when compared with the rest of the urban agglomeration. Besides, no Chinese residents (apart from servants) were allowed in these settlements.<sup>26</sup> So much was Canton a cohesive city that the figures produced by the statistical apparatus developed after 1921 by the Canton municipality (one of China's first modern-style municipalities) reflect a consistent reality corresponding to Canton's urban space almost in its entirety: it is the city that is under observation, not fragments of it.

Guangdong's capital, Canton, is worthy of study here also to make up for an astonishing lack of research on the city. To be sure, Canton has not been totally overlooked by historians. However, studies on Canton, inspired by the city's role as cradle of the revolution and springboard for the Guomindang's reunification of China, are generally devoted to political history,<sup>27</sup> except for Virgil Ho's work and a few recent Ph.D. disserta-

<sup>25</sup> For example, the city of Shanghai consisted of three parts: the French Settlement, the International Settlement, and the Chinese city.

<sup>26</sup> MAE, Nouvelle série, Sous-série Chine, file no. 588, report by the consul in Canton dated 6 March 1909; CWR, 29 December 1928, 8 July 1933.

<sup>27</sup> Michael Tsin, "The Cradle of Revolution: Politics and Society in Canton," Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1990; Michael Tsin, *Nation, Governance, and Modernity in China: Canton, 1900–1927* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999); Chan Ming Kou, "Labor and Empire: The Chinese Labor Movement in the Canton Delta, 1895–1927," Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1975; Chan Ming Kou, "A Turning Point in the Modern Chinese Revolution: The Historical Significance of the Canton Decade, 1917–1927," in Gail Hershatter, ed., *Remapping China: Fissures in Historical Terrain* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996); Arif Dirlik, "Narrativizing Revolution: The Guangzhou Uprising (11–13 December 1927) in Workers' Perspective," *Modern China* 23, no. 4 (October 1997): 363–397. Chinese research on the question is, quite unsurprisingly, even more marked by this form of political tropism. See for example the lengthy passages devoted to the Republican period in two overviews,



tions.<sup>28</sup> The impression conveyed in all the studies is that the term “Canton” designates not an urban space but a period of history common to the Guomindang and the Chinese Communist Party. It may be trivial, but it would not be pointless to note that Canton was truly a city and not just the stage for a drama that was played out beyond its confines. In any case, if Canton was able to serve as a base for the Guomindang in its military conquest of the country, this was manifestly because it was southern China’s biggest metropolis and, with 900,000 inhabitants, one of China’s four most populated cities.<sup>29</sup> Canton is located in the heart of the rich area known as the “Pearl River Delta” (which is actually the product of the confluence of three rivers: Xijiang, Beijiang, Dongjiang). Through the Xijiang, which is also a major navigable route, Canton is also linked to a vast hinterland extending far beyond the limits of Guangdong Province. Its administrative, artisanal, and above all mercantile functions partly eclipsed its industrial development, which, while less spectacular than that of Shanghai, was nonetheless real.<sup>30</sup>

By the same token, the fact that this city became a focal point of political radicalism resulted from some of its own inherent characteristics, and especially its pronounced permeability to Western ideas.<sup>31</sup> In this respect, Canton’s situation appears to have been somewhat paradoxical. Standing apart from the other great open ports of Tianjin, Wuhan, and Shanghai, in which the foreign settlements were the natural focus of Western influence, Canton followed another model. Foreign influence in Canton penetrated firstly via Hong Kong, with Shamian serving as a stepping-stone. Canton

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which, as it happens, are very useful: Yang Wanxiu and Zhong Zhuoan, *Guangzhou jianshi* [Abridged history of Canton] (Canton: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1996), 352–498; Jiang Zuyuan and Fang Zhiqin, *Jianming Guangdong shi* [Summary history of Guangdong] (Canton: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1993), 653–819.

<sup>28</sup> Ho, *Understanding Canton*; Shuk Wah Poon, “Refashioning Popular Religion: Common People and the State in Republican Guangzhou,” Ph.D. thesis, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, 2001; Wing Yu Hans Yeung, “Guangzhou, 1800–1925: The Urban Evolution of a Provincial Capital,” Ph.D. thesis, Hong Kong University, 1999.

<sup>29</sup> Tōadobunkai, *Shina nenkan* [South China statistical yearbook] (Tokyo: Tōadobunkai chōsa hensabu, 1912), vol. 1, p. 8.

<sup>30</sup> Tōkyō chigakukyō kai, *Naka shina oyobi minami shina* [Middle China and Southern China] (Tokyo: Tōkyō chigakukyōkai, 1917), 383–384; Baba Kūwatarō and Murakami Keijirō, *Nanshina goshō no gensei* [The real situation in South China’s five provinces] (Tokyo: Sanseidō, 1939), 265–324. For the elements of a detailed description of the different sectors, cf. Zhang Xiaohui, *Minguo shiqi Guangdong shehui jingjishi* [Economic and social history of Guangdong in the Republican period] (Canton: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2005), 83–131.

<sup>31</sup> There is no lack of firsthand accounts emphasizing the special importance of Western influence in Canton: Hu Puan, *Zhonghua quanguo fengsu zhi* [Collection of customs throughout China] (Shanghai: Dada tushu gongyingshe, 1936), vol. 4, p. 5; Gotō Asatarō, *Saishin Shina ryōkō annai* [The latest China travel guides] (Tokyo: Kōga shoin, 1938), 208.

in effect had very close ties with Hong Kong, which was only 150 kilometers away and within easy reach by boat and (after 1911) by train. Hong Kong's Chinese population came in the main from Guangdong Province, and even though other dialects (*kejiahua*, *chaozhouhua*) were spoken there, Cantonese became its lingua franca. In very troubled times, the British territory would routinely become a refuge for wealthy Cantonese. In money matters, the Canton elites all preferred the Hong Kong banks, the currency of which circulated extensively in Canton.<sup>32</sup> It was a known fact that many in Canton would read the Chinese-language press from Hong Kong.<sup>33</sup> There are innumerable examples of the true osmosis that existed between the two cities.

A second fact of major importance was that Canton's destiny was closely linked to overseas Chinese communities. There was an intense flow of people, ideas, and capital between Canton and the principal lands of Chinese emigration—California, Australia, and Southeast Asia. Canton city became modernized during the Republican period under the leadership of men educated in U.S. universities.<sup>34</sup>

It therefore seems to be a matter of urgency that a history be written of this leading metropolis, with its openness to Western ideas and its unmistakable role as a laboratory of modernity in China at that time; not the customary chronicle of Sun Yat-sen's three successive Cantonese governments, but quite simply an urban history.

Opium is particularly suitable as a theme with which to embark on this project. Looking at opium in all its facets will give us an incomparable tool for probing into the depths of Cantonese society under the late Qing and the Republic. Opium, like prostitution, is a transversal subject par excellence. Opium was smoked by Cantonese from every section of society. Opium consumption was of considerable economic importance, not only for the authorities but also for the powerful merchants' syndicates to whom the procurement of opium supplies from remote provinces was farmed out. It was a matter of importance also for those organizations that took charge of the clandestine circuits, not to mention all the staff of the opium houses and, naturally at the end of the chain, the smokers who devoted a part of their budget to opium. Also, the consumption of opium clearly took place in the urban space, just like other leisure activities (cinemas, dancing halls) in full spate of growth during this period: certain

<sup>32</sup> Tōkyō chigaku kyōkai, *Nakashina oyobi minami shina*, 314; CWR, 8 July 1933.

<sup>33</sup> Zhou Kaiqing, *Jinri zhi Huanan* [Present-day southern China] (Shanghai: Guang-mingshu, 1937), 40–41.

<sup>34</sup> Michael Tsin, "Remapping Canton," in Joseph Esherick, ed., *Remaking the Chinese City: Modernity and National Identity, 1900–1950* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), 23–29.



districts had remarkable densities of opium houses that struck contemporary observers and led to their being objectively defined as spaces especially dedicated to opium.

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The perspective and the geographical framework of this study have been defined, but we still have to establish its boundaries in time. The fall of the empire in 1912, marking political change of uncontested importance, appeared to be the obvious choice for a starting point. However, the fact is that the attitude of the authorities to opium shows a remarkable continuity reaching back into the years that preceded the 1912 boundary. In Canton as in the rest of China, it was the anti-opium edict of September 1906 that marked the essential break with the past. The years that followed saw energetic anti-opium action deployed with effective results. The government that came out of the 1911 Revolution continued firmly on the course set by the imperial authorities in 1906. It is only from 1915 onward, and gradually, that the political will to eliminate opium consumption withered away (despite an ephemeral revival between 1920 and 1923).

The collapse of the empire and the gradual attendant decline of central power inaugurated a period of great political instability during which different authorities succeeded one another and even cohabited as rivals in Canton.<sup>35</sup> Opium then came to the fore as a strategic bone of contention to be fought over by the different parties in their ambitions to sustain a lasting hold on the city against the appetites of neighboring forces. Canton's return to the fold of central authority in July 1936 brought an end to this situation. The ground realities changed also because, for the first time in a quarter century, the city was repositioned within the framework of a nationwide opium elimination policy, the Six-Year Plan, which the Guomindang authorities had already been implementing elsewhere in China for nearly two years.<sup>36</sup> This is why I have chosen 1936 as the date with which to bring this study to a close.

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<sup>35</sup> Between 1912 and 1936, five years was the longest period for which any political authority stayed in power—as it happened, that of Chen Jitang (1931–1936).

<sup>36</sup> The application of the Six-Year Plan in Canton between 1936 and 1937 is dealt with in chapter 4 of my dissertation: Paulès, “L’opium à Canton, 1912–1937,” 187–253.



## The Material and Structural History

Opium could be described as a complex substance containing about twenty alkaloids, chiefly morphine, along with sugars, acids, and resins in variable proportions,<sup>1</sup> but this would be like saying that wine is fermented grape juice. These factual statements do not quite tell us why well-to-do Parisians in the nineteenth century were partial to “Bordeaux” and “Burgundy” or why wealthy Cantonese in the 1930s would pay three times more for opium from India than for its Chinese equivalent. To the connoisseur, opium from Guizhou was inferior to the Manghai and Huaye varieties from Yunnan yet preferable to opium produced in eastern Guangdong.<sup>2</sup> It was all opium, but the quality, virtues, and reputation varied from region to region.

Historical works on opium are concerned mainly with its political and economic implications and tend to relegate the modes of production and consumption to a few lines or pages. This approach will not do in a study seeking to focus on the consumption side of the question. Grasping all the complexity of the product and its mode of consumption is indispensable if we are to understand the smoker’s behavior, the strategies of distinction (in Pierre Bourdieu’s meaning of the term), and the rationale behind the fraudulent activity that pervaded this sector. These are all questions closely linked to issues of quality, reputation, and price. This chapter will attempt to uncover the complex reality behind the fog that surrounds the word “opium.”

The geographical circuits of the procurement of raw opium saw major upheavals in the period under study, and this greatly affected the price of the drug. This fact is as important as it is difficult to study. And yet, it is almost completely absent in previous works on the subject. Also, a catalog

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Dikötter, Lars Laamann, and Zhou Xun, *Narcotic Culture: A History of Drugs in China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 8, 84–85.

<sup>2</sup> XGR, 14 June 1935.

of structural data on the opium question would be incomplete without a reference to smuggling, which, far from being a marginal activity, was a permanent and well-organized fixture. These two aspects made it an inescapable part of the opium supply scene, an irremovable presence that weighed heavily on official monopolies.

## Opium and Other Narcotics: The Material History

### *From Poppy Sap to Prepared Opium*

The cultivation of *Papaver somniferum*, the poppy plant from which opium is derived,<sup>3</sup> has been studied quite exhaustively in many works. In southern China, as in India, poppy was a winter crop.<sup>4</sup> In a province like Yunnan, planting generally started at the beginning of November. The harvest was in May, thus allowing a summer crop to follow immediately on the same land. Poppy cultivation was generally more profitable than food crops but required intensive labor.<sup>5</sup> It also had the advantage of not exhausting the soil when sufficient fertilizer was applied.<sup>6</sup> In addition to the sap of the seedpod from which opium was extracted, the plant had other economic uses. The seeds, for example, were a source of edible oil.<sup>7</sup>

The morphology of the *Papaver somniferum* flower is similar to that of the *Papaverrhoeas*, the cornfield poppy. In the flowering season, the petals are white, red, or purplish. The plumpness of the oval-shaped pod depends on the quality of the soil, varying in size between a hen's egg and a duck's egg. Harvesting must be done just after the petals have dropped when the pod is still green and has not reached full ripeness.<sup>8</sup>

The usual method for collecting sap was to cut notched incisions into the pods. This was done every evening. The incisions, one millimeter apart,

<sup>3</sup> Two useful studies on the question are Dikötter, Laamann, and Zhou, *Narcotic Culture*, 46–50, and Edward Slack, *Opium, State, and Society: China's Narco-economy and the Guomindang, 1924–1937* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), 6–15.

<sup>4</sup> Memorandum on Opium for Presentation to the International Opium Commission Meeting in Shanghai, February 1909, 12; Joyce Madancy, *The Troublesome Legacy of Commissioner Lin, 1820s to 1920s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 63.

<sup>5</sup> Tao Kangde, *Yapian zhi jinxi* [Opium yesterday and today] (Shanghai: Yuzhoufeng chubanshe, 1937), 55.

<sup>6</sup> For a more detailed description of the hydrological conditions and soil types required for poppy cultivation, see Zhu Qingbao, Jiang Qiuming, and Zhang Shijie, *Yapian yu jindai Zhongguo* [Opium and contemporary China] (Nanjing: Jiangsu jiaoyu chubanshe, 1995), 19–200.

<sup>7</sup> Dikötter, Laamann, and Zhou, *Narcotic Culture*, 47–48; French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (hereafter cited as MAE), Série Asie 1918–29, Sous-série affaires communes, file no. 123, microfilm P10050, letter from the French consul in Chengdu to the minister of Foreign Affairs dated 17 September 1921.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Gide, *L'opium* (Paris: Sirey, 1910), 33.

were made with three pins held between the thumb and the forefinger. The operation was done swiftly and called for some dexterity. Care had to be taken not to penetrate into the core of the pod as this would make the sap flow inward and get lost among the seeds.<sup>9</sup> But the incisions could not be too shallow either or no sap would flow. The sap flowed through the night, forming a gum that was collected with a scraping tool the next morning and deposited in a hollow bamboo stem.<sup>10</sup> Depending on the size of the pods, the incisions would be repeated every evening for three to five days. The collected gum was exposed for several weeks, and its surface gradually thickened in contact with the air. It was then molded in several stages, finally attaining the form of easily transportable, grey, lightweight slabs. This was raw opium (*shengyan* or again *yantu*) of a consistency that depended on its age and varied between that of mastic and dried mud.<sup>11</sup> Raw opium improved with storage over a few years, and few connoisseurs appreciated opium that had been harvested in the same year.

The quality of opium differed vastly according to the region of its provenance. Indian opium outclassed its rivals and was prized throughout this period for its exquisite flavor. There was a hierarchy among Indian opium varieties. Foremost were the “Bengal” varieties. These were actually Patna and Benares varieties, cultivated in the Gangetic plane and exported via Calcutta.<sup>12</sup> From 1773 onward, poppy cultivation and the preparation of raw opium in India gradually came under British monopoly. The British opium agency made constant efforts to maintain high quality through a system of stringent chemical checks and tests. This explains the renown of Bengal opium over the Malwa variety. The latter, cultivated in the central Indian states (present-day Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan), escaped the strict conditions of a monopoly regime and was exported through Bombay.<sup>13</sup>

In China itself, the provinces producing high-quality opium were marked by a fairly general typology. Yunnan headed the list, followed by Guizhou and then Sichuan. There were even finer variations within

<sup>9</sup> Paul Butel, *L'opium: Histoire d'une fascination* (Paris: Perrin, 1995), 14.

<sup>10</sup> MAE, Série Asie 1918–29, file no. 55, report by Doctor Jarland, “L’opium au Yunnan, ses conséquences sociales” [Opium in Yunnan and its social consequences], 25 October 1924.

<sup>11</sup> MAE, Série Asie 1918–29, file no. 55, report by Doctor Jarland, “L’opium au Yunnan.”

<sup>12</sup> Patna and Benares, about 300 kilometers apart on the Gangetic plain, both had opium factories. The Patna factory processed poppy gum from the Bihar region. Opium from the Benares region was sent to the Ghazipur factory (Carl Trocki, *Opium, Empire, and the Political Economy: A Study of the Asian Opium Trade, 1750–1950* [London: Routledge, 1999], 62–69).

<sup>13</sup> Alain Le Pichon, *Aux origines de Hong Kong, aspects de la civilisation commerciale à Canton: Le fonds de commerce de Jardine, Matheson & Co., 1827–1839* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1998), 60–64; Trocki, *Opium, Empire*, 70, 75–82.

a province as vast as Yunnan. Opium grown in southern Yunnan, especially in the Jingdong, Jinggu, and Qiubei districts, was the most highly reputed.<sup>14</sup>

Guangdong's soil and climate made it inhospitable to poppy cultivation.<sup>15</sup> Certain periods had seen the cultivation of limited quantities in the eastern parts of the province.<sup>16</sup> This opium had been essentially for local consumption, had never enjoyed much of a reputation, and was never a significant part of the opium consumed in Canton itself.

The process of transforming raw opium into prepared opium (*yangao*) by boiling was always the same, with a few minor differences. First, raw opium was dissolved in an equivalent volume of water in a copper pot (plate 1) under low heat. Then, water was added to the pot—5 liters for every 600-gram slab of opium.<sup>17</sup> Very often, the dross left after smoking was added to the pot for its residual morphine. In the mid-1930s under the Canton monopoly, the boiling mixture would contain 60 percent of raw opium and 40 percent of dross.<sup>18</sup> The mixture was stirred continually in order to prevent the preparation from sticking. When reduced by a third, the liquid was filtered through several thicknesses of paper.<sup>19</sup> The filtrate was then concentrated by slow cooking over a low fire until it attained a syrupy, molasses-like consistency. The operation was a very delicate one. Insufficiently cooked opium could not be picked up with a needle—a necessary step in the smoking ritual. Prolonged cooking, on the other hand, would affect its flavor.<sup>20</sup> Some connoisseurs would not smoke prepared opium until it had been put through an ageing process.

Opium lost about a third of its mass in boiling. This is why references to quantities of opium must clearly state whether the product is raw or prepared (a point omitted in many sources). As a rule, opium was boiled close to its place of final consumption because it was more easily transported in raw form. The preparation of opium lent itself extremely well to fraudulent activities of all kinds. Opium dens and agencies would frequently

<sup>14</sup> Zhu Qingbao, *Yapian yu jindai Zhongguo*, 161.

<sup>15</sup> *Judu yuekan* 95 (December 1935): 1.

<sup>16</sup> For example, see the report by Wyatt Smith, British consul at Shantou, to the Anglo-Chinese Commission, which inspected poppy cultivation areas in Guangdong Province from 19 March to 15 April. It is worth noting that the commission visited only the easternmost parts of the province (FO 415, appendix to a letter from Alston to Balfour on 6 August 1917). In the mid-1920s, there were opium plantations in this area too (*Opium Cultivation and Traffic in China, 1925–1926*, 22–23).

<sup>17</sup> W. Lichtenfelder, *Le pavot à opium* (Hanoi: FH Schneider, 1903), 25.

<sup>18</sup> XGR, 14 June 1935. Another source from 1931 gives a maximum dross content of only 30 percent for the manufacture of legal opium (*Minguo ribao*, 27 July 1931).

<sup>19</sup> MAE, Série Asie 1918–29, file no. 55, report by Doctor Jarland.

<sup>20</sup> Zhu Qingbao, *Yapian yu jindai Zhongguo*, 162.

adulterate their product with low-quality opium and substances such as pork fat and plant resins.<sup>21</sup>

### *Opium Consumption*

China and opium are very closely linked in the Western imagination. Roland Barthes in *Mythologies* only repeats a commonplace view when he describes the opium pipe as the “requisite symbol of Chinese-ness.”<sup>22</sup> However, far from being peculiar to China, opium was widely used in many European countries and also in Turkey, India, and Russia. It made an appearance in the pharmacopeia at the French court at the beginning of the eighteenth century. The Duc de Saint-Simon reported that, in February 1712, the Dauphin’s consort was taking opium to relieve the early pains of an illness that was to prove fatal.<sup>23</sup> Laudanum, “black drop,” and about ten other similar opium-based remedies were very widely prescribed throughout Europe in the nineteenth century. What distinguished China ultimately was the fact that opium was not ingested there as it was elsewhere. From the eighteenth century onward, at least, it was smoked.<sup>24</sup>

### The Paraphernalia<sup>25</sup>

Foremost was the pipe made up of two detachable parts: a stem (*yanguan*) and a bowl (*yandou*). The complete pipe, ready for use, was the *yangqiang*. Pipes were generally taken apart for easy transport.<sup>26</sup>

The bowl could be cylindrical, hemispherical, or truncatedly conical. It was about 3 centimeters high with a diameter of about 6 centimeters. Its upper part, flat or slightly convex, was pierced in the middle with a pinhole, known as the *doumen* or *douyan*. The lower part was flat with a small central cylinder, about 2 centimeters high, that fixed it to the pipe. The bowl had to be hermetically fitted to the pipe to prevent the smoke from losing any of its virtues. A chink in the apparatus could force the smoker to pull very hard on the pipe, causing discomfort and even exhaustion. This is why the sealing would be reinforced with bits of paper

<sup>21</sup> FO 371/2650, letter from the consul in Canton to the Embassy on 19 October 1915; Liang Guowu, “Wu Tiecheng tongzhi Guangdong shiqi ‘jinyan’ heimu” [The truth about the opium suppression policy in Guangdong under Wu Tiecheng], in *Guangdong wenshi ziliao* [Historical materials on Guangdong] (Canton: Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi, Guangdongsheng weiyuanhui wenshi ziliao yanjiu weiyuanhui, 1964), vol. 16, pp. 130–132.

<sup>22</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris: Seuil, 1957), 147.

<sup>23</sup> Saint-Simon, *Mémoires* (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade), vol. 4, p. 399.

<sup>24</sup> As pointed out in the introduction, it was in eighteenth-century China that opium consumption appeared in the form described in this chapter. There was no change in practices thereafter. Also as indicated in the introduction, opium had been smoked earlier but as *madak*.

<sup>25</sup> Plate 2 depicts different items of the smoker’s paraphernalia.

<sup>26</sup> *Shishi huabao* 36 (January 1907): 3b (ill. 26).

or cloth.<sup>27</sup> A close scrutiny of contemporary pictorial material and of pipes kept in museums shows that the pipe makers would often use a knot in the bamboo and its corresponding bud to more solidly fix the metal fitting (or “saddle”) through which the bowl was plugged into the stem.<sup>28</sup> The stem proper, about 50 centimeters long with a diameter of 3 centimeters, was closed on the side on which the bowl was attached, at about a third of its length. Its rather impressive length was designed to let the smoke cool down before inhalation.

Smokers generally used pipes of bamboo (and sometimes other woods) with a ceramic bowl. Yazhou bamboo and spotted bamboo from Hunan (*xiang feizhu*) were particularly sought after.<sup>29</sup> Of course, far more precious materials could be used. Aficionados sought pipes of extraordinary refinement. There were pipes inlaid with precious metal or ivory, others made entirely out of ivory or rhinoceros horn.<sup>30</sup>

It was not only the preciousness of the materials that determined the value of a pipe. Its seasoning, as it changed over years of use, became a much appreciated token of its age and value.<sup>31</sup> In Canton during the Republican period, some old pipes were so famous that certain opium houses owed a part of their success to the skillful management of their pipe collections.<sup>32</sup>

As for the bowls, the preciousness of the materials was often of less importance than the prestige of the bowl makers and the brands. There were many brands, but Xiangniang and Qingcao were most often mentioned as the ultimate in bowls.<sup>33</sup> Apart from their intrinsic qualities, these bowls were rare items since they had been made during the Qing period.<sup>34</sup>

Many luxury pipes had inscriptions and decorations. Short poems extolling the pleasures of opium smoking could be found on the stems while

<sup>27</sup> MAE, Série Asie 1918–29, file no. 55, report by Doctor Jarland; Lichtenfelder, *Le pavot*, 30–31. Little strips of cloth can still be seen in the pipe at the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle de Lyon, catalog no. 7001 0454 3069.

<sup>28</sup> Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle de Lyon, pipes catalogued under nos. 6000 6767, 6000 2525, 6000 1252; *Shishi huabao* 12 (June 1907): 6a.

<sup>29</sup> YHB, 9 July and 16 November 1930.

<sup>30</sup> *Huazi ribao*, 9 June 1927. The Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle de Lyon has a pipe with a silver, ceramic, and copper bowl and an ivory stem (catalog no. 7001 0454 3069).

<sup>31</sup> *Yuzhoufeng banyuekan* 17 (16 May 1936): 228; YHB, 21 October 1934.

<sup>32</sup> YHB, 9 June 1930; *Zhujiang xingqi huabao* 4 (circa 1927): 18.

<sup>33</sup> Luo Liming, *Tangxi huayue hen* [Remembering the wonders of Tangxi] (Hong Kong: Mingbao chubanshe, 1994), vol. 2, pp. 253–254; YHB, 10 June 1935, 27 December 1931; GMR, 22 April 1924; Cun Shi (pseudonym), “Yanhua xueleihua Chentang” [Words and tears of blood from Yanhua in the Chentang District], in *Guangdong fengqing lu* [The rake's Guangdong] (Hong Kong: Zhongyuan chubanshe, 1987), 268; *Huazi ribao*, 9 June 1927.

<sup>34</sup> Luo Liming, *Tangxi huayue hen*, 254.



the bowls carried fine etchings of crabs, buffaloes, and landscapes.<sup>35</sup> The search for ultimate refinement led connoisseurs to listen very closely for the pleasing sounds that a pipe could emit when the smoke was sucked in through the bowl.<sup>36</sup>

A needle (*yantou* or *yanqianzi*) made of iron and a lamp (*yandeng*) served to fashion the little opium pellets for smoking. The needle was extremely fine, pointed at one end and rather flattened at the other, and nearly 20 centimeters long.<sup>37</sup> The characteristically oval-shaped lamp had a cotton wick seated in peanut oil (*huashengyou*) that gave off no odor that might interfere with the fragrance of the opium.<sup>38</sup> The lamp was fitted with a glass sleeve (*dengzhao*), to give a uniform temperature at its outlet.<sup>39</sup> The pedestal was made of metal or terracotta.

There were, in addition, utensils to clean the pipe. There was a rag, and also a metal scraper (*tietiao*) to scrape out the dross (*yanshi*, *yapian-shi*, or again *yanhui*) deposited inside the bowl. The scraper was used after the bowl had been detached from the pipe.<sup>40</sup> The opium cinders left over from cleaning the pipe were put into a special container as they were scraped off.

All this equipment was placed on a tray (*yanpan*) to protect the couch from being soiled.

### Smoking Manners

The opium smoker lay reclining on his side with his head generally resting on a porcelain pillow. The couch itself was often a simple mat. However, in the illustrations of the period, it is the "Arhat's bed,"<sup>41</sup> or *luohanchuang* (more simply the *luohan*), that is especially associated with the wealthier

<sup>35</sup> Cf. item catalogued under no. 6000 1251 in the holdings of the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle de Lyon.

<sup>36</sup> Luo Liming, *Tangxi huayue hen*, 253; YHB, 9 July 1930, *Yugong sanrikan* 31 (circa 1930).

<sup>37</sup> Item catalogued under no. 6000 3852 in the holdings of the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle de Lyon.

<sup>38</sup> Lin Manhong, "Qingmo shehui liuxingshixi yapian yanjiu: Gonggei mianfenxi, 1773–1906" [Study on the scale of opium consumption in late-Qing society: An analysis of the supply side, 1773–1906, Ph.D. thesis, Taiwan Normal University, 1985, 490 and 493; Liu Fujing and Wang Mingkun, *Guangdong yandu chang* [Prostitution, gambling, and opium in old-time Canton] (Hong Kong: Zhonghua shuju youxiang gongsi, 1992), 25–26.

<sup>39</sup> MAE, Série Asie 1918–29, file no. 55, report by Doctor Jarland.

<sup>40</sup> Item catalogued under no. 6000 2852 in the holdings of the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle de Lyon.

<sup>41</sup> The *arhat* (*luohan*) is a concept of Indian origin designating a person having merit sufficient to attain an advanced stage of sanctification, one who, having rid himself of all fetters, afflictions, and impurities, has escaped the cycle of rebirth. See Bhattacharya Narendra Nath, *A Glossary of Indian Religious Terms and Concepts* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1999).

smokers.<sup>42</sup> The *luohanchuang*, made of wood, was 2 m wide and only 1 m deep. It had a back that was slightly higher than the side panels. It was normally used as a single bed, but two smokers could sit on it face to face, at right angles to the back. A suitably high footrest, placed before each of them, made up for the narrowness of the bed.<sup>43</sup> The *luohanchuang* could even accommodate three smokers (*dasanxing*, or again *pinzixing*—referring to the form of the ideogram *pin* 品: one of the smokers would place himself lengthwise on the *luohan* and the other two would lie at right angles to him with their feet on the footrest).<sup>44</sup>

The consumer took the pipe in one hand and a metal needle in the other, using its tip to pick up a tiny ball of prepared opium. The ball was brought above the flame of the lamp (plate 4), where it thickened and started sputtering. The smoker would keep twirling the drop around the needle to stop it from falling off.<sup>45</sup> When the opium became consistent enough, he would plunge the needle back into the mass of opium to take up some more that he then heated, continuing this process until a pea-sized pellet was formed. He then kneaded the pellet into a cone that he introduced into the orifice of the bowl. When the needle was removed, a little hole would be left in the opium pellet.<sup>46</sup> This entire task of shaping opium pellets was called *dahe*, or *cuoyan*. It was generally understood that preparing an opium pipe took about half a gram of prepared opium, but of course the quantity varied according to the size of the pellet.<sup>47</sup>

When the pipe was ready, the orifice of the bowl could be brought before the flame. The smoker took a deep draught and then held in the smoke for as long as possible, expelling it in short little bursts. The pictorial material frequently shows a spittoon at the foot of the couch (see, e.g., plates 3, 4, 6, 7), suggesting that the particles inhaled along with the smoke provoked constant expectoration by the smokers. Tea is seen in many pictures (plates 3, 6, 8). It served to rinse the smoker's mouth and also quench his thirst.

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, *Tuhua ribao* 341 (ca. 1910): 7, 350: 5; *Shishi huabao* 21 (September 1907): 10b, 18 (November 1909): 5b; *Dianshizhai huabao* 18, no. 12 (n.d.): 89 (ills. 3, 4, 7).

<sup>43</sup> See *Tuhua ribao* 42 (ca. 1909): 5; *Opium, a World Problem* (March 1928): 34; *Dianshizhai huabao* 28, no. 12 (end of the 1880s): 95 (ills. 13, 14, 27).

<sup>44</sup> *Judu yuekan* 90 (June 1935): 5; Cun Shi, "Yanhua xueleihua chentang," 268–269; Zhong Zhongjin, *Guangzhou heishenhui miji* [Secret narratives from the Canton underworld] (Canton: Guangmin tushushe, 1949), 31.

<sup>45</sup> B. J. Logre, *Toxicomanies* (Paris: Stock, 1924), 81.

<sup>46</sup> Gide, *L'opium*, 94.

<sup>47</sup> R. K. Newman, "Opium Smoking in Late Imperial China: A Reconsideration," *Modern Asian Studies* 29, no. 4 (October 1995): 785; for his part, Logre estimated the amount at a quarter to half a gram, see Logre, *Toxicomanies*, 81.

The terms used for opium smoking itself varied greatly. The most usual ones in Canton included *dalaohu*, *dahu*, *xiyan*, *xiyapian*, *xiyangyan*, *xidayan*, *tunyun tuwu*, and *zhizhuheng chuang*. Others like *guoyin* and *shangdian* more particularly expressed the action of alleviating a craving.

Heating the opium pellet was the difficult part of the job because it had to be just right: if insufficiently heated, it could block the hole, but if overheated, it lost a part of its morphine.<sup>48</sup> It was a task that took patience, skill, and time, setting the practiced smoker apart from the novice, who was often the object of ridicule.<sup>49</sup> If preparing the pipes was not tedious enough, the smoker also had to clean the bowl out with the same tools after each pellet was finished. Smokers who could afford it employed the servers and staff of the opium houses to present them with the pipes ready for use. The wealthier Cantonese would even have a servant at home to prepare the opium pellets.<sup>50</sup> Here, a degree of virtuosity came into play: some would roll the pellets into special shapes of infinite variety, with names such as "Buddha's navel" (*foduqi*), "pagoda of accumulated wealth" (*duibaota*), "seven stars keeping company with the moon" (*qixingbanyue*), or "opium serpent" (*yanshe*).<sup>51</sup>

#### Effects on the Smoker

This is a complicated subject as it was above all a matter of personal experience and therefore is particularly difficult for the historian to grasp. I shall nonetheless attempt to briefly describe these effects using my Cantonese sources and setting aside eyewitness accounts by Western authors who were far too inclined to embroider upon the theme of the "Chinese ecstasy."<sup>52</sup> It must be remembered, though, that opium did not necessarily produce the same effects on everyone. These effects differed according to the quantities taken and the variety of opium used, and also depended on the individual (whose own addiction and physiological characteristics played a major role in the matter).

The oral ingestion of opium in large quantities causes death in a manner that is as certain as it is painless. Many candidates for suicide opted for this method. This particularly dramatic example apart, opium had four

<sup>48</sup> Zhu Qingbao, *Yapian yu jindai Zhongguo*, 163.

<sup>49</sup> Keith McMahon, "Opium and Sexuality in Late Qing Fiction," *Nannü* [Masculine/Feminine] 2, no. 1 (2000): 147.

<sup>50</sup> YHB, 1 July 1930.

<sup>51</sup> Zhu Qingbao, *Yapian yu jindai Zhongguo*, 163; Luo Liming, *Tangxi huayue hen*, 2:253; *Yugong sanrikan* 85 (circa 1930); Cun Shi, "Yanhua xueleihua chentang," 270.

<sup>52</sup> It was Pierre Loti who first used this expression in "Les derniers jours de Pékin," in *Voyages (1872–1913)* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1991), 1101.

types of effects: it was used to control sexual desire, and it was a stimulant, a relaxant, and a remedy for various kinds of ailments.

Frank Dikötter has already stressed that opium has been incorrectly called an “aphrodisiac” since it does not stimulate desire (the very definition of an aphrodisiac), but on the contrary calms it down and delays ejaculation thus prolonging the sex act.<sup>53</sup> Many sources in Canton mention this use of opium. One of them says: “in the heat of desire, opium can prolong sexual intercourse.”<sup>54</sup>

Opium was very frequently used in Canton as a stimulant by people doing heavy physical work. Rickshaw pullers for example used it as an aid against fatigue.<sup>55</sup> Actors in the Cantonese opera took opium in order to stay awake during the long exhausting nights demanded by their profession.<sup>56</sup>

As for the pleasures of smoking, we shall see that, when smokers extolled the benefits of opium, it was hardly its physical effects that they were referring to. The pleasure that they claimed to derive from opium took the form not of hallucinatory dreams,<sup>57</sup> but of a certain detachment from immediate cares. This emerges in statements made by Tanka smokers in an inquiry made in 1934:<sup>58</sup> “two pillows to allow conversation and an opium lamp are enough to dissipate all cares.”<sup>59</sup> Opium, with its promise of oblivion, made it possible to escape for a few brief moments from the cares of daily life.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Dikötter, Laamann, and Zhou, *Narcotic Culture*, 88–92.

<sup>54</sup> *Wuxian manhua* 3, no. 3 (18 January 1931): 5. See also *Banjiao manhua* 6, no. 8 (ca. 1932): 8; XGR, 20 June 1935; *Judu yuekan* 110 (March 1937): 22.

<sup>55</sup> Murayama Shigeru, *Kanton sadan* [About Canton] (Osaka: Kibunkan, 1941), 86–87; Guangzhou nianjian bianzuan weiyuanhui, *Guangzhou nianjian* [Canton statistical yearbook] (Canton, 1935), *shehui* section, 53; YHB, 4 and 5 May 1933, 4 February and 10 April 1934. The use of opium as a stimulant for manual workers is examined in chapter 7.

<sup>56</sup> Ho, *Understanding Canton*, 114 and 134.

<sup>57</sup> The Chinese sources never mention the unusual dreams that certain Western writers attributed to opium consumption. Jean Cocteau is positive on this point: “Il faudrait en finir avec la légende des visions de l’opium. L’opium alimente un demi-rêve. Il endort le sensible, exalte le cœur et allège l’esprit” (We must dispel legends about opium-induced visions. Opium feeds into a semi-dreaming state. It puts the senses to sleep, exalts the heart, and lightens the spirit). See Jean Cocteau, *Opium: Journal d’une désintoxication* (1930; Paris: Stock, 1999), 111.

<sup>58</sup> The Tankas (*danjia* in Mandarin Chinese) in Canton and other towns and cities in Guangdong were a population of “outcasts” of obscure origin, living permanently in houseboats on the Pearl River. The women were reputed to engage in prostitution, but, in fact, the Tankas practiced a wide variety of economic activities. See Hu Puan, *Zhonghua quanguo fengsu zhi*, 4:13.

<sup>59</sup> Lingnan shehui yanjiusuo, *Shanan danmin diaocha baogao* [Report on an inquiry into the Tankas of Shan'an] (Canton: Lingnan shehui yanjiusuo, 1934), 103.

<sup>60</sup> XGR, 14 June 1935; *Wuxianmanhua* 3, no. 3 (8 January 1931): 5.

Contrary to a general belief, smoking a few pipes was not followed as a rule by slumber. In an opium house, a client on his own might actually doze away after a few pipes, but this was above all a way of relaxing in the comfort of the reclining position.<sup>61</sup> After smoking, those smokers who came in groups tended to spend time in conversation.<sup>62</sup>

Containing alkaloids, opium has an analgesic effect and can be used to relieve chronic pain. Many in Canton also attributed curative properties to it. Lars Laamann has made a long list of illnesses, including plague and malaria, that were believed, at the end of the Qing dynasty, to be curable by opium.<sup>63</sup> As an easily accessible and relatively inexpensive commodity that brought immediate relief, opium was actually used as an all-purpose remedy among the population.<sup>64</sup> In the 1920s and 1930s, when the health care on offer in Canton was at a primitive level, opium played a role comparable to that of laudanum in nineteenth-century Europe.

There was also the question of dependency. There can be no doubt that opium is an addictive substance. However, the equation in which the opium smoker is equivalent to a drug addict is nothing but special pleading by the opponents of opium. The fact that many smokers were not dependent on the drug and the importance, in any adequate definition of opium consumption, of the smoker's relationship with dependency will be dealt with in a later chapter. But it needs to be stressed at this point that it is only smokers beyond the dependency threshold who were concerned by the serious effects of opium smoking on health.

#### Yantiao

We have seen that taking opium required considerable effort. In particular, the smoker had to master the necessary skills and spend some time making the opium pellets.

There was a sort of very low priced opium, *yantiao* (also called *yao-tiao*), which was an answer to these constraints. It was made by mixing prepared opium with a lot of dross. It looked like a paste and was rolled into the shape of a twig.<sup>65</sup> *Yantiao* saved time for two reasons. It was solid and quite ready for consumption, and so there was no need to prepare the

<sup>61</sup> H. H. Kane, *Opium Smoking in America and China* (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1882), 63.

<sup>62</sup> YHB, 7 January 1932; XGR, 14 June 1935, 20 June 1935. Opium smokers questioned by a journalist explained that opium enhanced the pleasures of conversation among friends.

<sup>63</sup> Lars Laamann, "A History of Narcotic Consumption in Modern China," *Twentieth-Century China* 28, no. 1 (November 2002): 3 and 9.

<sup>64</sup> See, for example, XGR, 20 June 1935. Since opium brought relief from pain, some smokers would inevitably believe that they had been cured of their ailments.

<sup>65</sup> *Renjianshi* 38 (20 October 1935): 19–21; YHB, 5 May 1933.

pellet and hold it over the flame of the lamp: *yantiao* could be fashioned and applied to the pipe in a few seconds. Second, it was also more potent than *yangao*. In all, two to three minutes were generally enough for the smoker to satisfy his craving—a tenth of the time needed to prepare and smoke classic prepared opium.<sup>66</sup> And it could be smoked with a shorter and less costly pipe that did not have the characteristic bowl and was simply extended at its end by a wider tube (see plate 9). On the down side, though, *yantiao* was bitter and unpleasant to the taste.

*Yantiao* had existed since the end of the Qing dynasty and had been known as *eryan*, literally “second-hand opium.”<sup>67</sup> Its continued success in Canton, linked especially to the existence of fully legal establishments in which only *yantiao* was consumed, is part of the reason why synthetic drugs such as morphine and heroin did not penetrate the Canton market.

### *The Synthetic Drugs: Morphine, Heroin*

Morphine and heroin, derived from advances in chemistry in the nineteenth century, were obtained by techniques more elaborate than those used for opium, which, in many respects and in sharp contrast, remained the product of a “cottage industry.” This is why we call them “synthetic drugs.” Their effects are reputed to be more powerful and swifter and, unlike opium, they are pure chemical substances.<sup>68</sup> Morphine was initially used in China as a cure for opium addiction, propagated by Western missionaries. Smoked, swallowed, or injected by needle, it began to rival opium by the end of the nineteenth century. In the second half of the 1910s, morphine imports from Japan into China became considerable, amounting to several hundred metric tonnes.<sup>69</sup> Initially used as an analgesic in medicine, the new drug heroin rose in popularity, and its use became more widespread in the 1920s.<sup>70</sup> These two drugs had the advantage of being easy to use because they required no complicated equipment. No long apprenticeship in the use of a syringe to inject oneself with morphine was required. It took much less time to consume these drugs, and they were far more potent and swift. They were also more discreet than opium, which was far too easily detected, not only by its smell but also by the noise that the smokers made when drawing on their pipes.

Heroin and morphine were used to compose a myriad of narcotic substances in various forms (such as powders, pills, and solutions), all

<sup>66</sup> YHB, 10 April 1934, 5 May and 25 June 1933; XGR, 25 February 1935.

<sup>67</sup> *Shishi huabao* 15 (July 1907): 12b–13a.

<sup>68</sup> While morphine and heroin molecules exist, there is obviously no such thing as an “opium molecule” to be isolated.

<sup>69</sup> Dikötter, Laamann, and Zhou, *Narcotic Culture*, 121–122, 147–154.

<sup>70</sup> Dikötter, Laamann, and Zhou, *Narcotic Culture*, 155, 165–166.

known by the generic name *dupin*.<sup>71</sup> The most famous were the “red pills” (*hongwan*). They were generally the size of a soybean, colored red or pink. According to reports by the Hong Kong Customs, they contained variable quantities of heroin and other substances such as caffeine, quinine, sugars (glucose, lactose etc), plant additives, or vanilla or rose flavors.<sup>72</sup> These pills were generally smoked like opium. However, as with *yantiao*, the equipment required was much simplified. All that was needed was a needle, a lamp, and a rudimentary pipe made entirely of bamboo or other recycled materials. There were a number of brands marked on the packages of the pills, of which the best known included “Three Peaches” (Santao) and “Silver” (Jinqian).<sup>73</sup>

Despite the advantages of these synthetic drugs, attempts to assess their impact in Canton show that they never seriously rivaled opium. Reports at different periods by diplomats replying to their superiors always state that substances like heroin and morphine were rarely used.<sup>74</sup> One account from a person living in Canton from 1925 to 1950 says that narcotics other than opium had no success at all in that city.<sup>75</sup> There were a few alarming reports and articles on an influx of morphine and its derivatives, but these were quite isolated and appeared in publications that were wont to exaggerate reports about the spread of drug abuse.<sup>76</sup> News items on morphine, heroin, and red pills in Canton were very rare. Even official statements on the fight against synthetic drugs in 1936 and 1937 downplayed the seriousness of the situation in Guangdong in comparison with northern China.<sup>77</sup>

Apart from the fact that *yantiao* occupied the foreground, so to speak, this impermeability of Canton to synthetic drugs can very probably be explained by one constant: these drugs had to face the unrelenting zeal

<sup>71</sup> *Report of the Government of Hong Kong for the Calendar Year 1934 on the Traffic in Opium and Other Dangerous Drugs* (Hong Kong: Noronha and Cie, n.d.), 2–4; Margareth Goldsmith, *The Trail of Opium, the Eleventh Plague* (London: Robert Hale, 1939), 233; Tract distributed for the anti-drug festival (GJWGJ, 145 [1937]); *Judu yuekan* 98 (March 1936): 28.

<sup>72</sup> *Report of the Government of Hong Kong for the Calendar Years 1933 and 1934*; SDN, file S196, report by the Treasury Solicitor's Office in Hong Kong dated 27 January 1930.

<sup>73</sup> *Report of the Government of Hong Kong for the Calendar Year 1936* (Hong Kong: Noronha and Cie, n.d.); *Renjianshi* 20 (20 January 1935): 12–13; *Xunhuan ribao*, 22 September 1936.

<sup>74</sup> SDN/LON file R785, report dated 6 May 1925 on Shantou District forwarded by the British Government; FO 228/4292, report by the consul in Canton dated 15 November 1930; Nantes, Série Pékin A, file no. 157, report by the consul in Canton dated 15 December 1932.

<sup>75</sup> Ho, *Understanding Canton*, p. 379, n. 27.

<sup>76</sup> *Judu yuekan* 90 (June 1935): 7; *China Year Book*, 1921–1922, 794.

<sup>77</sup> *Guangzhoushi gejie qingdu dahui, Guangzhoushi qingdu yundong tekan* [Special edition on the movement for the suppression of drugs in the city of Canton] (Canton: N.p., 1937), 39–40.



of the authorities for whom they were a twofold evil: not only were they harmful to the population but, in competing with opium, they also jeopardized a major source of revenue.<sup>78</sup> In 1935, anyone consuming substances such as red pills could be sentenced to five years in prison and fined up to 3,000 yuan.<sup>79</sup> Persons who manufactured or sold such pills faced the death penalty.<sup>80</sup>

At the same time, there is confirmation of Frank Dikötter's hypothesis that the spread of synthetic drugs was partly related at this time to their low cost when compared with opium.<sup>81</sup> There was a strong link between the spread of synthetic drugs and the high prices of opium.<sup>82</sup> It will be seen later that the short period (the second half of the 1910s) when morphine threatened to make its entry into the towns of the Guangdong coast corresponds to a spell of high opium prices.

## The Structure of Opium Procurement in Canton

### *The Supply Circuits and Their Development*

Opium procurement in Guangdong Province has never been the subject of specific research. However, it has been relatively well described in more general studies.<sup>83</sup>

### The Eviction of Indian Opium

Sichuan opium came on the scene in the 1870s, after nearly a century in which imports of Indian opium reigned almost unchallenged in the Canton market. It arrived along with smaller quantities of opium from Yunnan and Guizhou.<sup>84</sup> The fact is that there was no drop in the quantities of

<sup>78</sup> XGR, 29 September 1935; *Judu yuekan* 98 (March 1936): 28–29.

<sup>79</sup> Nantes, file no. 195, Annual Report of the Consular Medical Station in Canton for 1935.

<sup>80</sup> *Judu yuekan* 98 (March 1936): 28.

<sup>81</sup> Many sources from the period mention this link. See *Judu yuekan* 95 (December 1935): 4; Tao Kangde, *Yapian zhi jinxi*, 64.

<sup>82</sup> Dikötter, Laamann, and Zhou, *Narcotic Culture*, 9, 173, and 187–191. Oddly, Dikötter cites Hong Kong as an example of a market that resisted the entry of synthetic drugs because prepared opium was freely sold in the colony (159). However, the assertion that Hong Kong remained sheltered from synthetic drugs is highly disputable, especially if the situation there is compared with that of Canton. Thus, according to the *Report of the Government of Hong Kong for the Calendar Year 1936 on the Traffic in Opium and Other Dangerous Drugs*, 3.5 million red pills were seized in Hong Kong in that year. The fact is that while the sale of monopoly opium was indeed legal in Hong Kong, prices were high. Price differences therefore played a far more important role than the unrestricted sale of opium in the substitution of synthetic drugs for opium.

<sup>83</sup> See especially Slack, *Opium, State, and Society*, 26–28; Zhu Qingbao, *Yapian yu jindai Zhongguo*, 39–75; Ma Mozhen, *Dupin zai Zhongguo*, 110–113.

<sup>84</sup> Maritime Customs, special series no. 9, *Native Opium, 1887* (Shanghai, 1888); Maritime



Indian opium imported. In terms of percentage, however, Indian opium yielded ground to Chinese varieties.<sup>85</sup> In 1906, the Canton Maritime Customs registered 11,146 piculs imported from India as against 1,469 piculs from Sichuan and Yunnan.<sup>86</sup>

In fact, imports of Indian opium registered in Canton and figures for the consumption of Indian opium in Canton are two different things, above all because a part of the imports was actually intended for the city's hinterland, which stretched up to the province of Guangxi. However, it would still be reasonable to assume that these two figures developed in tandem. Imports of Indian opium into Canton, which, as we have just seen, amounted to 11,146 piculs in 1906, began to fall at a moderate pace in subsequent years. They still amounted to 10,060 piculs in 1908. From 1909 onward, the drop accelerated, with imports touching 1,475 piculs in 1914, 545 in 1915, and 139 in 1916.

Although the legal trade in Indian opium came to an end on 31 March 1917, this did not mean, and the point needs to be emphasized, that Indian opium no longer played any role in the Canton market. It continued in fact to flow in illegally through Macao, Hong Kong, and Guangzhouwan. This can be seen from an instance of destruction of contraband opium seized in Canton by the Maritime Customs administration on 16 September 1919. The raw opium that went up in smoke on this occasion came from Patna and from Yunnan, while the prepared opium came from Hong Kong, Macao, and Guangzhouwan.<sup>87</sup> These clandestine flows had existed in parallel with legal imports for many years, taking advantage especially of the favorable conditions offered since 1911 by the system for certifying Indian opium.<sup>88</sup> Thus, in 1913, the Canton press repeatedly echoed official requests to the French authorities asking them to put a stop to clandestine exports of opium from their territory of Guangzhouwan to Guangdong.<sup>89</sup>

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Customs, special series no. 14, *Opium Trade: March Quarter, 1889* (Shanghai, 1889); Su Zhi-liang, *Zhongguo dupin shi*, 163–166 and especially 187–191.

<sup>85</sup> Lin Manhong, *Qingmo shehui liuxing*, 206.

<sup>86</sup> Maritime Customs, *Returns of Trade and Trade Reports for the Year 1906, Canton Trade Report*, 401 (hereafter cited as *Returns of Trade* for 19—).

<sup>87</sup> National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), series no. 679 (Maritime Customs), file no. 20592, *Destruction of Opium Seized in Canton*, report dated 17 September 1919.

<sup>88</sup> Maritime Customs, *Returns of Trade* for 1916, 1065; *Returns of Trade* for 1917, 1147. From 1911 onward, certified opium was opium exported from India whose final destination was China proper. Opium intended (in theory) for local consumption in colonial territories such as Macao, Guangzhouwan, Hong Kong, and Indochina was therefore noncertified. For an explanation of the difference in prices between these two kinds of opium (the noncertified variety cost far less), see the beginning of chapter 2.

<sup>89</sup> *Guangdong gongbao* 213, 12 April 1913; see also Canton press cuttings for 1913 translated and collected in file Aix, GGI 64921.

At the beginning of the 1920s, there was a major development that can be shown by using Hong Kong as a sort of litmus test. Between 1919 and 1927, Hong Kong sold prepared Indian opium of constant quality and at a constant price (HK\$14.5 per *liang*). This is therefore a stable reference in the very unsettled world of opium flows into southern China.<sup>90</sup> The study of clandestine flows of opium coming in and out of this colony therefore sheds light on the relative competitiveness of the different varieties of opium available in the region.

In the second half of the 1910s, the biggest flows of prepared contraband opium were still those of Indian opium going out of Hong Kong to supply Canton.<sup>91</sup> On the contrary, no contraband Chinese opium came into Hong Kong itself. At the beginning of the 1920s, however, Hong Kong experienced a sudden flood of contraband opium, both raw and prepared, from China, a phenomenon that followed a spectacular resumption of opium production in China. This can be seen in the following table.

Chinese Opium Confiscated by the Hong Kong Customs (1918–1925)

Year	Raw		Prepared	
	Seizures	Quantities (liang)	Seizures	Quantities (liang)
1918	0	0	0	0
1919	2	1,558	44	6,088
1920	31	8,828	247	100,911
1921	272	102,960	365	22,537
1922	145	15,347	572	4,040
1923	240	38,146	962	8,362
1924	232	19,018	1,623	21,406
1925	189	15,548	1,888	35,679

Source: FO file 228/3886, letter from the British Embassy to the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 15 October 1928.

<sup>90</sup> Norman Miners, *Hong Kong under Imperial Rule* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 231. Miners gives a very useful table summarizing retail opium price trends in Hong Kong between 1900 and 1940. The price per *liang* remained stable at HK\$14.5 between June 1918 and October 1927.

<sup>91</sup> Maritime Customs, *Returns of Trade for 1917*, 1147.

Unfortunately, the following statistical series, which are for Indian and Chinese contraband raw opium seized in Canton, cover only three years: 1919, 1920, and 1921. The drop in seizures of raw Indian opium in Canton was as spectacular as the concomitant rise in seizures of raw opium coming from China, which had already been preponderant in 1919.<sup>92</sup> As the following table shows, the ratio of seizures of Chinese opium to those of Indian opium surged within two years from 6.8/1 in 1919 to 540/1 in 1921.

Raw Opium Confiscated in Canton (1919–1921)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Indian (liang)</i>	<i>Chinese (liang)</i>	<i>Ratio</i>
1919	274	1,879	6.84
1920	87	9,495	109.13
1921	13	7,021	540

*Source:* FO file 228/3365, report by the consul in Canton on 10 July 1922.

It is true that these figures for contraband opium seizures were much related to random factors. Occasionally, they reflect cases of sheer luck on the part of the customs officials. The zeal and material resources of the Hong Kong Customs and of the Canton Maritime Customs also varied considerably during the periods concerned. Thus, Norman Miners rightly points out that the years 1921–1922 were marked by strenuous efforts by the Hong Kong administration to stem the tide of opium smuggling.<sup>93</sup> However, these efforts were a response to a very real fact, specifically, the influx of clandestine Chinese opium from 1919 onward that reduced official sales by half in 1918 and 1920.

These reservations notwithstanding, and also because the way in which the figures evolved was perfectly consistent with the supply situation, their remarkable convergence for Hong Kong and Canton appears to be highly significant.

This spectacular reversal of clandestine opium flows between Hong Kong and China corresponded to an essential fact in the geopolitics of opium procurement not only for Canton but also for all the cities of China's southern coast: Indian opium was no longer competitive. However, because Indian opium remained one of the best thanks to the official

<sup>92</sup> The slight drop in opium seizures in Canton in 1921 and 1922 can probably be attributed to Chen Jiongming's unrelenting severity toward consumers in Canton; cf. chapter 2.

<sup>93</sup> Miners, *Hong Kong under Imperial Rule*, 246.

monopoly that ensured its quality, Hong Kong continued to supply the Canton market with small and illicit quantities from 1920 to 1930.

Macao presents a somewhat different picture, compelling us briefly to go back a few years in time. Smuggling in Macao shot up from the beginning of the century onward. An Anglo-Portuguese agreement signed on 14 June 1913 allowed Macao to procure large quantities of low-priced noncertified opium through the rest of the decade: 500 cases per year, of which 260 were for internal consumption in Macao and 240 for re-export to third countries.<sup>94</sup> In addition to these quantities of Indian opium legally imported for local requirements, which it must be said were set very liberally when compared with the colony's real consumption,<sup>95</sup> there were also illegal imports of Indian opium. These illegal imports, for example, amounted to a substantial total of 1,364 chests between July 1911 and June 1912.<sup>96</sup> These quantities were re-exported during the 1910s to China and other destinations.

Macao reorganized its policy after the turning point in 1920 and the rise in Chinese production. Competition from low-priced Chinese opium forced the Macao monopoly to reduce its official prices from HK\$6 to HK\$2.8 per *liang* in July 1927.<sup>97</sup> This was meant to deal with both Chinese and Persian contraband in the territory. Macao did of course continue to process Indian opium for its own monopoly, and a part of this opium was exported to China. However, the well-organized groups that were processing raw opium in Macao for illicit re-export, with the benevolence of the Portuguese authorities, began to incorporate increasing quantities of opium from Yunnan in their production. This became especially necessary as official procurements of Indian opium came to a halt as of 1927. Macao, seeking supplies for its own monopoly, then turned to Persia.<sup>98</sup>

Macao maintained a presence in the market of contraband opium smuggled into Canton and China only because of the renown of certain brands that were produced in the territory using mixtures of opium from different sources. The Macao opium tax farmer's brands, Flying Horse and Eagle (the former was of better quality), were known and appreciated

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<sup>94</sup> Geoffrey Gunn, *Encountering Macau, a Portuguese City-State on the Periphery of China, 1557–1999* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996), 85; FO 415, memorandum respecting import of raw opium in Macao, 21 March 1921, 74.

<sup>95</sup> FO 415, report by the consul in Canton dated 27 June 1921.

<sup>96</sup> Gunn, *Encountering Macau*, 83–84.

<sup>97</sup> FO 415, letter from Hayley Bell to Sir F. Aglen on 14 June 1921; Gunn, *Encountering Macau*, 86.

<sup>98</sup> Gunn, *Encountering Macau*, 83–87; FO 228/3371, Hong Kong Government report to the CO dated 15 November 1926.

in China and even among overseas Chinese communities.<sup>99</sup> These brands were considered to be the guarantee of a certain quality.<sup>100</sup> Not content with extensively imitating these brands and stealing their fame,<sup>101</sup> Macao's smugglers also launched their own brands. Red Lion, which was not produced by the Macao opium farmer or even sold legally in Macao, was a famous example. Red Lion opium was packaged in 1-*liang* boxes and, although its quality actually varied a great deal, it became the world's most famous brand at the beginning of the 1930s.<sup>102</sup> It will be seen later that these brands contributed to maintaining the importance of Macao as a provider of clandestine opium throughout Asia and even in the Americas.

However, ultimately in Canton, barely a few years after the interruption of official flows, clandestine imports of Indian opium dwindled to a level where they occupied a fairly marginal position. In the years from the 1920s to 1930, the small flows of contraband Indian opium from Hong Kong and, more importantly, Macao, to Canton were sufficient to meet the demand of a handful of very wealthy consumers who were not discouraged by its price.<sup>103</sup>

#### Persian Opium

Persian opium, or *hongtu*, had been present for decades in the Canton market.<sup>104</sup> American traders lacking access to Indian opium had originally imported it into Canton in the 1830s.<sup>105</sup> Despite substantial increases in the Persian output in the second half of the nineteenth century, especially in the Yazd, Fars, and Isfahan regions,<sup>106</sup> the quantities of Persian opium imported into Canton were almost negligible at the end of the empire.

<sup>99</sup> SCMP, 4 January 1931; *Report of the Government of Hong Kong for the Calendar Year 1930, 1931, 1932*; SDN/LON file S196, interview with Lui Kin Butt, expert on opium with the Macao opium agency dated 23 January 1930.

<sup>100</sup> *Report of the Government of Hong Kong for the Calendar Year 1930 on the Traffic in Opium and Dangerous Drugs*, 4.

<sup>101</sup> SDN/LON file S196, interview on 24 January 1930, with Jose Mendes Silvestre, inspector for taxes on consumption, and Pedro Jose Lobo, superintendent of the Macao Opium Authority.

<sup>102</sup> SCMP, 4 July 1931. Red Lion was a star brand at the beginning of the 1930s. The sources provide no explanation whatsoever for its disappearance from the market around 1935 (SDN/LON, file 1642, report by the French consul in Hong Kong on 15 January 1935).

<sup>103</sup> Guangdong Province Archives, series 94/1(Canton Customs Office), file no. 2236 (microfilm), report dated 17 December 1921 on opium in Canton; *Canton Gazette*, 1 August 1924, 18 August 1930; YHB, 27 October 1931.

<sup>104</sup> *Judu yuekan* 97 (February 1936): 19; *Judu yuekan* 108 (January 1937): 9.

<sup>105</sup> Le Pichon, *Aux origines de Hong Kong*, 59.

<sup>106</sup> Rudi Matthee, *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Drugs and Stimulants in Iranian History, 1500–1900* (Washington, DC: Mage Publishers, 2005), 213–217.

The year 1911 was a lean one with only twelve chests imported in all.<sup>107</sup> It might have been expected that the disappearance of Indian opium in the 1920s would open up new prospects, but Persian opium continued to play a very minor role.

Persian opium was characteristically very rich in morphine (containing 10–12% of it, whereas opium from Bengal contained only about 6%). Besides, it was no more costly than other varieties: in Shantou in 1935, it was even less costly than opium from Yunnan.<sup>108</sup> However, it had little success because of its very distinctive flavor, which was not pleasing to Chinese consumers and came from substances that were mixed locally into the raw opium, especially a resinous gum from the sarcocol shrub (*Ferula persica*). The Persian state was incapable of instituting controls similar to those that ensured the high quality of Indian opium and could have greatly expanded the outlets of Persian opium in China.<sup>109</sup>

### Chinese Opium

The surge in opium output in Yunnan, Guizhou, and Sichuan during the last thirty years of the nineteenth century was brought into question after the 1906 edict ordering the gradual elimination of opium. Indeed, here as elsewhere, poppy planting slowed down greatly.<sup>110</sup> From 1912 onward, the Maritime Customs recorded no official imports of Chinese opium into Canton.<sup>111</sup>

Sichuan, the main supplier of opium consumed in Canton at the end of the empire, never regained its importance during the Republican period.<sup>112</sup> Yunnan and Guizhou however would return to the forefront. Poppy production resumed in Yunnan around 1915/1916 and expanded in a

<sup>107</sup> Maritime Customs, *Returns of Trade for 1912*, 1054.

<sup>108</sup> *Judu yuekan* 97 (February 1936): 20. However, some scepticism is in order here as the table in which the assertion appears is replete with errors.

<sup>109</sup> MAE, Série Asie 1918–29, file no. 51, letter from the French Consulate in the Dutch East Indies dated 20 March 1928; letter from the French minister in Persia to minister of Foreign Affairs, dated 8 February 1928; SDN/LON, file S196, interview with Mohamed Nemazee dated 18 January 1930.

<sup>110</sup> Su Zhiliang, *Zhongguo dupin shi*, 214–215. According to Su, nationwide poppy output dropped by nearly 73 percent between 1906 and 1910.

<sup>111</sup> Maritime Customs, *Returns of Trade for 1914*, 1054.

<sup>112</sup> In 1905, for example, Sichuan accounted for 68 percent of imports of Chinese opium into Canton (Maritime Customs, *Returns of Trade for 1905*, 401). The decline of Sichuan as an opium supplier under the Republic was probably related to communications problems resulting from political fragmentation.

big way in subsequent years,<sup>113</sup> and Guizhou followed suit.<sup>114</sup> The opium routes through Guangxi Province saw renewed activity in the middle of the 1910s.<sup>115</sup> The revival of these routes was encouraged by movements of Long Jiguang's troops (he held Guangdong during this period). These troop movements were accompanied by opium consignments traveling between their province of origin (Yunnan) and Guangdong Province.<sup>116</sup> The scene was set for the next twenty years when opium flowed through channels, both legal and illegal, that were contingent on political developments. During this period, the main route for opium supplies to Canton was through the direct link from Yunnan and, to a lesser extent, from Guizhou.<sup>117</sup>

However, although opium production in southwestern China had already been revived for some years, there were two factors at the beginning of the 1920s that acted as a brake on the growth of opium flows between the two opium-producing provinces and Canton. First, there were troubles in Guangxi in 1920 and 1921.<sup>118</sup> When these troubles were quelled, a new obstacle to the natural and free flow of opium arose in the person of Chen Jiongming and his vigorous policy of prohibition in Canton.<sup>119</sup> However, once the barriers set up by this already obsolete policy were lifted, Canton became inundated with abundant influxes of opium.

The conveyance of opium supplies to Canton (see map 6) could form the subject of a book on its own. There appears to have been considerable

<sup>113</sup> MAE, Série Asie 1918–29, file no. 59, note by Bourgeois, 10 May 1923; Lucien Bianco, "The Response of Opium Growers to Eradication Campaigns and the Poppy Tax, 1907–1949," in Timothy Brook and Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi, eds., *Opium Regimes: China, Britain, and Japan, 1839–1952* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 293.

<sup>114</sup> Yu Ende, *Zhongguo jinyan faling bianqian shi* [History of the development of laws on the prohibition of opium in China] (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1934), 178; MAE, Série Asie 1918–29, file no. 123, microfilm P10050, report by the French vice-consul in Chongqing to the French minister in China on 21 June 1919.

<sup>115</sup> FO 228/3362, report of the commissioner of Maritime Customs in Nanning dated 23 November 1920; Zhao Yinting and Fan Zixi, "Sanshi niandai de Wuzhou yapien pifasha" [The wholesale opium trade in Wuzhou in the 1930s], in Li Bingxin et al., *Jindai Zhongguo yandu xiezhen*, 1:595; Cen Jianying, *Guangxi baise de yanbang* [Opium trading companies at Baise in Guangxi], in Li Bingxin et al., *Jindai Zhongguo*, 1:590.

<sup>116</sup> National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), series no. 679 (Maritime Customs), file 32385, Canton correspondence, report dated 11 February 1916; Maritime Customs, *Returns of Trade*, 1915, Canton Trade Report; Maritime Customs, *Returns of Trade for 1916*; Zuimian Shanren (pseudonym), *Guangdong heimu daguan* [The great show of the Guangdong underworld] (Canton, ca. 1920), 6–9.

<sup>117</sup> A report by the British Consul in Canton dated 31 August 1932 estimated that the opium came mostly from Yunnan (15 million taels against 1.2 million taels per year for Guizhou; CO 825/13/9).

<sup>118</sup> FO 228/3363, report by the consul in Canton dated 28 June 1921.

<sup>119</sup> See chapter 2.



complexity in the organization and financing of the opium convoys, which often deployed several thousands of men, because, below a certain critical size, they could fall prey to brigands.<sup>120</sup> The development of these large convoys points to the existence of powerful trading companies specializing in the transportation of opium over long distances and mobilizing vast amounts of capital.<sup>121</sup> These powerful trading companies were linked, at different steps of the circuit, to local bosses who showed no hesitation in being associated with them. The companies had such a hold over the local routes that, as we shall see later, they became the indispensable partners of the Canton authorities. And yet the big opium convoys were not the only ones to supply Guangdong. Small merchants and travelers also tried their luck with far less spectacular consignments and were able to supply the Cantonese market both legally and through numerous smuggling channels.<sup>122</sup>

These opium convoys profoundly affected the provinces that they traveled through. The authorities were able to levy charges at different stages on the journey, especially in Guangxi, so much so that these levies became a key source of tax revenue.<sup>123</sup>

The opium routes themselves frequently changed because of various factors, especially political ones. Logistically, the most convenient route for opium from Yunnan followed the railroad from Kunming to Haiphong in Indochina and thence the sea route up to Canton. This route, however, never became a major one for the opium transporters. The French authorities, having initially shown some circumspect disregard for their own obligations under international treaties (signed at conferences at The Hague in 1911 and 1913),<sup>124</sup> ultimately yielded to a barrage of British criticism. From 1923 onward, they became intransigent toward the opium trade, refusing to let any opium pass through Tonkin.<sup>125</sup>

<sup>120</sup> Aix, GGI 42889, note by Battalion Commander Pelud on 29 November 1922 describing these huge convoys. One such convoy, formed by the association of more than half a dozen groups, comprised, for example, 4,000 coolies and 1,000 escorts for a 50-tonne consignment of raw opium.

<sup>121</sup> Aix, GGI 42972, confidential report by Bodard on opium conveyed in transit through Tonkin, dated 13 August 1923.

<sup>122</sup> Cen Jianying, *Guangxi baise*, 591; *Huazi ribao*, 8 July 1928; *YHB*, 15 April 1933.

<sup>123</sup> This importance has been highlighted especially in the case of Guangxi Province: Eugene Levich, *The Kwangsi Way in Kuomintang China, 1931–1939* (Armonk, NY: an East Gate Book, M. E. Sharpe, 1984), 241–246.

<sup>124</sup> See Thomas David Reins, “China and the International Politics of Opium, 1900–1937: The Impact of Reform, Revenue, and The Unequal Treaties,” Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1981, 82–83.

<sup>125</sup> Aix, GGI 42972, confidential report by Bodard dated 13 August 1923 on the passage of opium consignments via Tonkin. The last convoy carrying about one hundred metric tonnes,



With this passage cut off, the convoys were reduced to two routes. The first, used only for opium from Yunnan, continued to take the railway from Tonkin, but only up to the last station before the Indochina border with China. There, the drug was unloaded and carried by land through Jingxi and Longzhou up to the sea port of Dongxing (Tunghing or Tonghing in certain Western sources), whence it went by boat up to Canton.<sup>126</sup>

The second route was used for opium from Yunnan as well as Guizhou. It passed through the town of Baise (then written as Pose, Bose, or even Poseh) on the border between Yunnan and Guangxi, which was the point of convergence of opium from Yunnan and from southwest Guizhou.<sup>127</sup> Then, the opium traveled by the rivers Youjiang, Yujiang, and Xunjiang,<sup>128</sup> which all flow from west to east, via Nanning, then through Guangxi Province up to Wuzhou.<sup>129</sup> Other opium routes from Guizhou joined this major and preferred opium route between Nanning and Wuzhou.<sup>130</sup> Wuzhou, which is Guangdong's river port on the Xijiang (Western River), situated at the outlet of the biggest opium flows in southern China, then, became a nerve center of trading in opium destined for Canton in the same way as Baise and Dongxing.<sup>131</sup>

However, these two habitual routes would on occasion be temporarily abandoned and alternative routes used instead. The best-known example is from 1935. It came about as a result of a major political change on the national scene, when Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek), who had just taken

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which went by the Tonkin Railway, did not escape the attention of the British diplomats. The correspondence on this subject is collected in MAE, *Série Asie* 1918–29, file no. 59.

<sup>126</sup> The convoys that took this route were reported in several dispatches by the Governor General of Indochina. The importance of this route does not seem to have been exaggerated by the sources. Indeed, the convoys went out at regular intervals. Their size in proportion to, for example, consumption in Canton was considerable: a convoy of fifty tonnes of raw opium corresponded to more than six months' consumption.

<sup>127</sup> Cen Jianying, *Guangxi baise de yanbang*, 590–594; SDN/LON, file R785, memorandum from the British Government to the League of Nations dated 22 January 1925; MAE, *Série Asie* 1918–29, file no. 109, letter from the French consul at Longzhou and Nanning (Guangxi) dated 16 August 1933.

<sup>128</sup> Actually one and the same river, but the name changes twice over its course.

<sup>129</sup> For a very detailed and lively report on the transportation of opium by this route, in 1916, see SCMP, 13 January 1916.

<sup>130</sup> MAE, SDN/LON series, file no. 1642, report dated 28 February 1935 by the chief of staff of the French Consulate at Longzhou and Nanning, 28 February 1935.

<sup>131</sup> Chen Dayou, "Yijiuershi zhi yijiusansi nianjian de Guangdong jinyan" [The prohibition of opium in Guangdong from 1926 to 1934], in *Guangzhou wenshi ziliao* [Historical materials on Canton] (Canton: Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi, Guangdongsheng Guangzhoushi weiyuanhui wenshi ziliao yanjiu weiyuanhui, 1963), vol. 9, p. 120. For a description of opium-related activity during the Republican period in Wuzhou, see Zhao Yinting and Fan Zixi, "Wuzhou yapien yantu hangyeshi" [History of raw opium trading companies in Wuzhou], in Li Bingxin, ed., *Jindai Zhongguo yandu xiezhen*, 1:599–610.

control of the rebellious province of Guizhou, was able to divert the province's opium exports from the Guangxi routes toward the northeast and the Changjiang Basin. This maneuver was designed, at one stroke, to bind Guizhou totally into the Nanjing-controlled opium circuit and, more importantly, to deprive the rebellious provinces of Guangxi and Guangdong of a source of revenue that was vital to their continued autonomy.<sup>132</sup>

When the provinces of Yunnan and Guizhou definitively replaced India in the 1920s as suppliers of opium for Canton, it was a major turning point in the history of opium in Canton. No other similar upheaval occurred until the Japanese occupation at the end of the 1930s, when the Japanese army cut Canton off from its traditional hinterland and thus enforced a complete reorganization of the opium routes to Canton.<sup>133</sup>

*Estimating the Quantities of Opium Sold in the Canton Market*

There is very little data on the quantities of opium consumed in the Canton market, and there are no official figures that could shed light on the matter. Among the contemporary estimates, we must exclude those based on the quantities of raw opium that entered the city as opium chests actually intended for redistribution elsewhere—the countryside and lesser towns in the province. Besides, the sources never explicitly say whether their figures relate only to legal opium consumption (which is quite probably the case). In short, all that can be had is an order of magnitude, expressed in quantities of prepared opium.

In the early stages of the Qing opium suppression policy, a French report put the daily consumption of *yangao* at 6,000 to 8,000 *liang* per day (6.7 to 8.9 tonnes every month).<sup>134</sup> In 1924, a report by the Maritime Customs put the consumption of prepared opium at 4,000 *liang* per day or 120,000 *liang* per month (4.4 tonnes).<sup>135</sup> Two years later, the journal *Judu yuekan* claimed, certainly with some exaggeration, that 10,000 *liang* of prepared opium were being consumed daily in Canton (i.e., more than 11 tonnes a

<sup>132</sup> National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), Maritime Customs, file no. 679/32416; Zhao Yingting and Fan Zixi, "Wuzhou yapien yantu hangyeshi," 1:608; Nantes, file no. 157, report dated 10 December 1932 by the French consul in Nanning.

<sup>133</sup> Li Enhan, "Ribei zai Huanan de fandu huodong, 1937–1945" [Opium trafficking by Japan in South China], *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo jikan* (Taiwan) 31 (1989): 156–158; Chen Dayou, "Yijiuerliu zhi yijiusansi," 131.

<sup>134</sup> Aix, GGI 43019, report by Rozier to the governor-general of Indochina dated 12 October 1907, "Etude sur la question de l'opium en Extrême Orient" [Study on the opium question in the Far East], 32–33. It must be pointed out that this very detailed and voluminous report actually covers only Hong Kong and Canton.

<sup>135</sup> National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), series no. 679 (Maritime Customs), file no. 14220, Canton District occurrences (January–June 1924), report dated 21 February 1924.

month).<sup>136</sup> In 1928, an article in the *Huazi ribao* gave a figure of 5,000 *liang* per day (5.5 tonnes per month) in normal conditions.<sup>137</sup> In 1935, using the figures for the permits in circulation, a journalist estimated the quantities consumed in the opium houses, public places, and homes, arriving at a monthly figure of 130,000 *liang* (4.8 tonnes) of prepared opium.<sup>138</sup> In the same period, a report in *Judu yuekan* estimated that 7,000 *liang* of prepared opium were produced daily in Canton, amounting to 7.8 tonnes a month.<sup>139</sup> An official report dated 15 September 1936 and addressed to Jiang Jieshi gave no figures for the quantities sold but set a goal for the new opium administration: monthly consumption in Canton was to be reduced to 70,000 *liang*, that is, 2.6 tonnes.<sup>140</sup>

This succession of figures cannot serve to reconstruct a general trend in the quantity of opium consumed in Canton. However, it demarcates a range of approximate values: the figures for periods when opium consumption was legalized range from 4.4 tonnes to 9 tonnes a month of prepared opium.<sup>141</sup> If these figures are related to the population of the city, which can be put at one million at the beginning of the 1930s,<sup>142</sup> we get an average of 4.4 to 9 grams per month per inhabitant, a figure that is far from spectacular since the average smoker smoked about 4 grams per day.

#### *Opium Varieties and Price Trends*

The numerous possibilities of blends and mixes, not to mention the numerous taxes that were applied to prepared opium and the margins extracted by the vendors, are major obstacles to arriving at any definition of opium prices. This is why, unlike in the case of the figures available for

<sup>136</sup> *Judu yuekan* 23 (July 1928): 48. This source is given to exaggerating the impact of opium. The attractiveness of the rounded-off and spectacular figure of 10,000 *liang* certainly played a role too. This figure was also put forward by Yu Ende in his book (*Zhongguo jinyan faling*, 181). But it is also very likely that he was reproducing data from the *Judu yuekan*, as he does very extensively throughout his book.

<sup>137</sup> The article deals with the sharp drop in legally permitted sales following the growth in contraband opium sales and the action of the authorities to cope with it (*Huazi ribao*, 9 June 1928).

<sup>138</sup> XGR, 14 June 1935.

<sup>139</sup> *Judu yuekan* 90 (June 1935): 9. An article in XGR dated 4 March 1937 gives exactly the same estimate for the period preceding the takeover of the province by the Guomindang.

<sup>140</sup> National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), series no. 41, file no. 519.

<sup>141</sup> I have preferred to discard the figure of 11 tonnes per month as a probable overestimation and have reduced it to 9 tonnes.

<sup>142</sup> According to official data, the population of the city in June 1929 was 843,611: Guangzhoushi shizhengfu tongjigu, *Guangzhoushi zhengfu tongji nianjian* [Statistical yearbook of the Municipal Government of Canton] (Canton: Guangzhoushi shizhengfu, 1929), 41. Allowing for errors in the census, it can be assumed that the population was already close to a million in 1930.

quantities of opium in the Canton market, the question of prices shall be looked at from the angle of the raw material, that is, raw opium on its arrival in Canton.

The price of this raw opium is relatively easy to ascertain for the second half of the nineteenth century because foreign imports largely dominated the market and the Maritime Customs gave precise data on the import price of the drug. Canton's opium supplies were then so dependent on the chests arriving from India that the prices given by the Maritime Customs quite faithfully reflect the evolution of the drug's endpoint retail prices.

After this period, however, major price differences could be seen between Indian, Chinese, and Persian opium. This naturally became even truer in the 1920s and 1930s when imported Indian opium no longer set the price trends.

One example of the range of prices in the mid-1930s clearly illustrates the fact that the notion of a single "opium price" is inadequate and that there was a hierarchy of Chinese opium varieties justifying price differences in a ratio of one to three:

*Price of 1 liang of Raw Opium in Canton in 1935*

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Superior raw opium from Yunnan:	4 to 4.5 yuan
Average opium from Yunnan:	2.2 yuan
Opium from Guizhou:	1.8 to 1.9 yuan

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*Source: XGR, 14 June 1935.*

This hierarchy, which reflects consumer tastes and the quality of the product, remained remarkably stable throughout the period. The costliest varieties continued to be Indian. Next came opium from Yunnan and then varieties from Guizhou. The least prized varieties of Chinese opium came from Jiangxi, Fujian, or again Guangxi, or even eastern Guangdong.

Not only were the prices of opium varieties very different but, even under the Republic, the available sources do not serve to track their progress from year to year.<sup>143</sup> All we can do therefore is to chart general price trends. While the notion of a "price of opium" may be handy, it will be

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<sup>143</sup> The question could be further complicated by the fact that opium prices varied sharply from region to region in the short term and were linked to random circumstances of harvest or transportation. However, regulatory mechanisms explain the fact that these variations were limited in range and short lived (Paulès, "L'opium à Canton," 60–61).

used here and later to refer only to an estimate of a level of dearness of raw opium and not to a determined and precise value.

The sources, despite their interrupted and heterogeneous nature, at least give a glimpse into the existence of fairly sudden and wide-ranging oscillations in the cost of raw opium supplies. These oscillations stemmed from immediate circumstances. Early 1930 furnishes a typical example of these sudden changes in opium prices. War between the two Guangs (which had broken out in April 1929)<sup>144</sup> was then raging at its height. The Nanning-Baise-Wuzhou route was cut off by the Guangxi forces and, in February, raw opium prices at Wuzhou doubled from their usual level. At the same time, the Guangxi troops were dogged on their Western flank by troops from Yunnan claiming loyalty to Nanjing. One of the prizes at stake in these operations was control over Dongxing, which, as we have seen, was a vital relay point on one of the major opium routes. Over a few weeks, the Dongxing port was taken and retaken several times in succession by the warring parties.<sup>145</sup> All these operations and the uncertainties that they raised led to a suspension of the convoys of raw opium supplying Canton. The raw opium stocks melted away and prices soared. Inevitably, the changes in the prices of the raw material were reflected in those of opium retailed in Canton.<sup>146</sup> In the meantime, the authorities and merchants involved in the opium trade looked for ways to get around this difficulty. The route through southern Hunan was considered.<sup>147</sup> The French consul received repeated requests to let a convoy of opium travel on the Yunnan-Haiphong railway line.<sup>148</sup> Sometime later, the Yunnan government explored the possibilities of air transport.<sup>149</sup>

Prices continued to rise until the end of hostilities restored normal communications through Guangxi, and, for this reason, 1930 stands out as a year when opium prices rose for a specific reason, thus clearly demonstrating that changes in opium prices could sometimes be chaotic. Although such short-term variations cannot be described in full detail, it is possible nevertheless to chart the major structural trends in the evolution of prices.

<sup>144</sup> Yang Wanxiu, *Guangzhou jianshi*, 477.

<sup>145</sup> Aix, GGI 42896, report by the French consul in Yunnanfu dated 23 May 1930; Aix, GGI 42888, telegram dated 7 July 1930 from Saigon to the Colonial Ministry; Nantes, Pékin Série A, file no. 157, report dated 23 May 1930 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs delegation to Yunnan Province.

<sup>146</sup> YHB, 14 February and 15 May 1930.

<sup>147</sup> FO 415, report by the consul in Canton dated 16 May 1930.

<sup>148</sup> MAE, Série Asie 1930–40, file no. 114, dispatch by the French consul in Canton to the French minister in Peking on 11 February 1930.

<sup>149</sup> MAE, Série Asie 1930–40, file no. 114, telegram received at the Quai d'Orsay on 4 November 1930.

The price of opium increased in the last years of the empire. Three factors propelled this increase. First, Chinese opium gradually became more scarce, quite simply because of the application of the 1906 Plan. The second reason shall be described in detail in the next chapter: it was the acceptance by the British in 1911 of a threefold increase in taxes on imports of Indian opium.<sup>150</sup> Thirdly and lastly, wealthy consumers who were also speculators built up stocks in anticipation of the end of opium sales, which obviously led to an increase in prices.<sup>151</sup> The price rises were punctuated by abrupt reversals as in 1910. However, these incidental downturns did not buck the basic trend that took opium prices to a peak.<sup>152</sup>

The end of the empire did not really interrupt the upward trend. There was of course a sudden drop in prices in Canton at the very beginning of the Republic because of some anxiety over the city's policy of prohibition.<sup>153</sup> However, after the British administration in India decided in January to stop sales of certified opium, the quantities of opium available for legal import into the Chinese market became limited. Moreover, the buyers started anticipating the end of opium exports from India, and prices rose.<sup>154</sup> On the whole, the first years of the Republic were a period when opium continued to be costly.<sup>155</sup> Long Jiguang's policy, adopted in 1915, of enforcing extremely high prices in his opium distribution system, testifies to this fact,<sup>156</sup> since such a policy could manifestly not have been conceived

<sup>150</sup> Maritime Customs, *Returns of Trade for 1911*, 647.

<sup>151</sup> Miners, *Hong Kong under Imperial Rule*, 221; MAE, Nouvelle série, Sous-série Chine, file no. 678, report of the Chinese legation on the China trade in 1908.

<sup>152</sup> Taking Guangzhouwan as an observation point, Antoine Vannière's Ph.D. thesis also notes the general rise in opium prices in the region: "Le territoire à bail de Guangzhouwan: Une impasse de la colonisation française en Asie orientale, 1898–1946" [The leasehold territory of Guangzhouwan: An impasse in French colonization in East Asia], Ph.D. thesis, University of Paris 7, 2004, 201. Wang Hongbin has noted the same trend in Shanghai (*Jindu shijian*, 320–321).

<sup>153</sup> There was something of an absurd situation. Under the 1907 and 1911 agreements between China and Great Britain, the Canton authorities could not prohibit the purchase of opium imported from India. At the same time, they were fully entitled to prohibit its consumption. The opium purchased by Chinese merchants in the city was therefore sent, in theory, to the hinterland where the prohibition did not apply (see chapter 2). This is why we can discuss opium prices even though its consumption was prohibited.

<sup>154</sup> The suspension of sales of certified Indian opium was initially planned for a period of three months but actually turned out to be permanent (Miners, *Hong Kong under Imperial Rule*, 222).

<sup>155</sup> Maritime Customs, *Decennial Report, 1912–1921*, 189; *Huaguobao*, 19 October 1914; this situation also owed much to the British traders who worked together to push the prices up (Miners, *Hong Kong under Imperial Rule*, 234–235).

<sup>156</sup> See chapter 2.

in a context of low-priced opium. Prices seem to have remained high in the second half of the 1910s, during the occupation by the Guangxi Clique.<sup>157</sup>

We have seen earlier that the years 1920–1925 were marked by the growing importance of the provinces of southwest China as purveyors of ever larger quantities of opium. The logical result of this abundance in the supply was a drop in the prices of opium traveling out of the producing provinces. Thus, at Baise in 1918, 1 *liang* of raw opium from Guizhou was sold for 6.35 units of Guangxi currency. The price fell to 2.1 units in 1919 and then to 0.95 a year later. An exactly similar development was seen at Nanning.<sup>158</sup> A trend toward cheap opium in Canton was clearly emerging since large-scale poppy production had resumed in Yunnan and Guizhou.

Once Chen Jiongming, the diehard champion of strict prohibition, had been ousted from the city in early 1923, abundant supplies of cheap opium were brought in by soldiers allied with Sun Yat-sen.<sup>159</sup> So sudden was this turn of events that it drew the attention of observers. Many indeed saw 1923 as a turning point for opium prices: in March 1923 a report by the Maritime Customs mentioned that prices in the opium houses protected by Sun Yat-sen's mercenaries had dropped to very low levels.<sup>160</sup> An article in the *Canton Gazette* on 21 December 1923 reported that opium was flooding into the province and that its price was particularly low.

This was the beginning of a period of low-cost opium that lasted—barring times of specific crises such as that of 1930—until the Japanese occupation. The end of the 1930s saw the emergence of a long-term trend of constantly increasing opium prices.<sup>161</sup>

The reversal in this trend at the beginning of the 1920s had a major indirect consequence in that it contributed decisively to stopping the entry of morphine, which had made inroads into Canton and the provincial ports during the second half of the 1910s.<sup>162</sup> At that time, it was the high cost of opium that had paved the way for this new drug. However, by 1922,

<sup>157</sup> National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), series no. 679 (Maritime Customs), file no. 32410, Canton Current Events and Rumors (1917), report dated 15 February 1917; FO 228/3360, report dated 17 January 1920 from the consul in Canton to the embassy.

<sup>158</sup> FO 228/3362, report by the commissioner of the Maritime Customs of Nanning dated 23 November 1920.

<sup>159</sup> Ye Shaohua, "Guangzhou jinyan quanli de zhengduo" [Rivalries for control over the prohibition of opium in Canton], in *Guangzhou wenshi ziliao* (1963), 9:112.

<sup>160</sup> National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), series no. 679 (Maritime Customs), file no. 14218, events and current rumors (January–June 1923), report dated 17 March 1923.

<sup>161</sup> Guangdong jinyanliuyisuo, *Guangdong jinyan liuyisuo chengli*, 19; GJJ, *gongdu zhaiyao* section, 19. Although it was called a "quarterly," only one issue of this magazine was ever published.

<sup>162</sup> SCMP, 28 January 1916; *Bulletin of the International Anti-Opium Association* (June 1920).



morphine was already in retreat.<sup>163</sup> While morphine seizures still amounted to 67 *liang* in 1919, they were nonexistent in the next two years.<sup>164</sup> By the mid-1920s, the arrival of morphine was only a memory.

The macroeconomic study of price changes that we have sketched is of course interesting in itself because it had major consequences for the general situation of opium consumption in Canton. However, it needs to be complemented by what might be called a microeconomic approach seeking to determine the cost of a single dose of opium and the place occupied by opium consumption in the individual Cantonese smoker's budget.

This approach would look at a consumer in an opium house buying of officially available prepared opium in the 1930s, a period of low-cost opium, and one for which the documents are less scarce. Assuming that this individual was an average Cantonese smoker consuming a little less than 0.1 *liang* of prepared opium per day,<sup>165</sup> his daily consumption would have been to the tune of 0.5 yuan since the price of 1 *liang* of prepared opium was at least 5 yuan.

This calculation gives results that are slightly higher than those indicated in the rare sociological inquiries on certain groups of the Canton population that refer to opium consumption. A study on the city's workers in the 1930s covering 311 families found that the five smokers encountered in this group spent an average of 0.3 yuan per day on the drug (the heaviest consumer smoked 0.6 yuan worth of opium and the lightest consumer smoked 0.07 yuan worth).<sup>166</sup>

Another inquiry, on the Tankas of Shanan District, asserts that, in a group of about 40 smokers, moderate consumers (which is what the majority of this group were) smoked the equivalent of 0.2 yuan per day while a heavy smoker smoked 0.6 yuan worth and, in two extreme cases, up to 1 yuan worth.<sup>167</sup> Even if the inquiry does not give average consumption figures, it can be surmised from the report it would have been about 0.3 yuan per day as in the previous inquiry.

The inquiry on the Tankas is especially invaluable not only because it covers a greater number of cases but also because it provides precise

<sup>163</sup> FO 228/3365, report by the consul in Canton dated 27 September 1922.

<sup>164</sup> FO 228/3365, report by the consul in Canton dated 10 July 1922.

<sup>165</sup> See chapter 7.

<sup>166</sup> Yu Qizhong, *Guangzhou gongren jiating zhi yanjiu* [Inquiry into workers' families in Canton] (Guangzhou: Guoli Zhongshan daxue jingji diaochachu, 1934), 65. The author of the inquiry took care to specify that the reason why he was able to collect only 5 case histories out of a total of 311 was reluctance on the part of those questioned to admit that they were smokers. It is probably only the publicly known smokers that admitted to the practice—this means that the average of 0.3% was probably above the true figure.

<sup>167</sup> Lingnan shehui yanjiusuo, *Shanan danmin*, 103.



data on the income level of the population concerned, which, it may be noted, did not consist of poor people only. The average monthly income of the head of a household was 25.8 yuan. A rapid calculation, based on the assumption of even a modest consumption of 0.2 yuan per day, establishes that in this case, consumption of the drug accounted for at least 23% of monthly income. However, this result must be moderated by the fact that, in these families, all the healthy individuals worked. The income of a household was therefore appreciably greater than that of its head alone and amounted on an average to 46.7 yuan.<sup>168</sup> Since, as a rule, neither women nor children consumed opium, the weight of the drug as a proportion of the total family income amounted appreciably to about 12.8%.<sup>169</sup> Again, an analysis of consumption behavior by families in relation to income shows that in the *shihao feiyong* category (*shihao feiyong* was a somewhat disparaging term for leisure expenses), which included opium, consumption of this drug represented a smaller percentage of the budget of the poorest families.<sup>170</sup>

Despite these corrective details which tend to put opium's impact into perspective, the impression given by the case of the Tankas of Shanan is that the drug was well capable of destabilizing the precarious budget of a low-income family, an impression reinforced by lists in the press of families ruined by opium.<sup>171</sup>

It must not be forgotten though that the poorest smokers had options available such as *yantiao*<sup>172</sup> or contraband opium that were known to be less costly. This is probably a partial explanation of why an a priori reconstitution of expenditure based on costs of officially distributed prepared opium gives a considerably higher figure (0.5 yuan per day) than that obtained from inquiries made directly with the consumers (approximately 0.3 yuan per day).

<sup>168</sup> Lingnan shehui yanjiusuo, *Shanan danmin*, 54. More than 6% of the families earned more than 100 yuan per month.

<sup>169</sup> Interestingly, it was precisely the need to keep opium-related family expenditure at an acceptable level in the poorer families that acted as a powerful incentive to keeping women and children away from the drug. The financial sacrifice represented by opium smoking could be envisaged only as a means to sustain the family's main earner. In Emile Zola's novel *Germinal*, the meager quantities of meat consumed by the Maheu household are reserved neither for La Maheude nor for the children but for the father (*Les Rougon-Macquart* [Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade], 3:1228–1229).

<sup>170</sup> Lingnan shehui yanjiusuo, *Shanan danmin*, 60.

<sup>171</sup> YHB, 5 February 1930, 7 March 1930, 21 August 1931, 22 October 1931, 11 June 1935; XGR, 21 January 1935.

<sup>172</sup> A rickshaw puller reported that, when visiting a *yantiao*-smoking house, he could satisfy his craving within half an hour for as little as 0.1 yuan (YHB, 5 May 1933).

The answer to the question of the place of opium in the smoker's budget therefore depends on a very large number of different factors. First, we need to know if we are looking at a time before or after the major change in opium price trends that came about at the start of the 1920s. However, that is not all. The answer will also differ hugely depending on whether the smoker used extremely low-cost contraband opium, *yantiao*, or luxury-quality opium, whether or not he consumed it on his own, and whether or not he needed a permit. Of course, we need to consider the quantities consumed and emphasize the fact that there were numerous smokers who smoked only on special occasions or sometimes to keep company with friends who were smokers.

All the same, we can conclude already that officially available, prepared opium was not accessible to all and sundry—except as an occasional practice—and that this remained the case even after the big drop in prices at the beginning of the 1920s. The poorer consumers very probably could not take opium every day unless they were prepared to fall back on lower-category products.

### Smuggling: A Basic Reality

The multitude of taxes levied between the poppy production stage and the stage of final consumption made smuggling a constant factor throughout the period. The term “smuggling,” usually defined with reference to a specific legal framework, is difficult to apply to cases such as that of the Yunnan government, which organized the harvesting and transportation of opium up to Dongxing or Baise, even if that meant breaking the law of the land and violating international agreements. When Chen Jitang organized convoys of raw opium to Guangdong, protecting them with his own troops for his own benefit and at the expense of the system controlled by the central government, it is a moot point as to whether “contraband” or “smuggling” are the right terms to be applied to what he was doing.<sup>173</sup>

In this context, therefore, “smuggling” needs to be defined more precisely as an activity infringing a law backed up by a degree of coercive power, an activity therefore entailing a degree of risk. By this ad hoc definition, these two examples do not amount to smuggling. However, the Cantonese merchants who transported opium from Yunnan through Baise or Wuzhou under the very noses of the customs officials and distributed it clandestinely on the Cantonese market could definitely be considered to have been indulging in smuggling, even if they benefited from a measure of official (and remunerated) complicity, which suggests that they acted with some impunity.

<sup>173</sup> *Minguo ribao*, 22 June 1931.

I shall therefore, for the time being, leave aside the question of official supplies to the province. These shall be examined in chapter 3.

The limitations dictated by this definition notwithstanding, opium smuggling did apparently take a wide variety of forms. The most elaborate and lucrative of them implied the existence of highly organized gangs, but it was quite possible for individuals on their own to indulge in occasional bouts of smuggling for small gains.

### *The Smuggling Circuits*

Guangdong Province alone does not offer a sufficient framework within which we can understand the organization and flows of illicit opium trafficking. These must be examined against a larger backdrop since their very existence, especially in its most elaborate forms, was intended to meet demand at great distances from the areas of production.

First, there were those scattered, minor clandestine trafficking operations grafted on to the major supply route that linked the opium-producing provinces to Guangdong and Hong Kong. These operations duplicated the official opium circuits and were a constant factor during this period. They were multiform, complex, and very easily merged into the trade flows that connected these remote provinces to the markets of the coastal cities. A few *liang* of opium could easily be concealed in a consignment of goods or even in personal baggage in the boats that sailed down the Xijiang.<sup>174</sup>

At the other end of the scale and clearly distinct from these modest forms of smuggling, there were highly sophisticated organizations that made far greater profits. They took their supplies from a variety of sources and targeted especially the Hong Kong and Overseas Chinese markets, Hong Kong being a particularly attractive outlet because of the very high price of official opium in the territory.<sup>175</sup> One organization that was dismantled in 1923 purchased raw opium from Yunnan at Beihai and transported it via Haikou (a port situated on Hainan Island) to Hong Kong, where it was retailed.<sup>176</sup> Another organization, brought to light in 1926,

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<sup>174</sup> Guangdong Province Archives, series no. 94/1, file no. 2236, note on illicit trade in opium, prices, etc., Canton and district, 9 December 1921.

<sup>175</sup> In the region, the prices in Hong Kong appear to be remarkably high: officially sold opium was six times costlier than in Macao, four times costlier than in Guangzhouwan, and 50 percent costlier than in Indochina. Only in Singapore were the prices higher. For a table with a comparison of the prices in Swiss francs in 1930, see League of Nations, Commission of Enquiry into the Control of Opium-Smoking in the Far-East (*Report to the Council*, Geneva, 1930, 1:42). Report with comparative tables, maps, and illustration.

<sup>176</sup> SDN/LON, file R784, report by J. D. Lloyd, superintendent of Imports and Exports in Hong Kong, on 12 December 1923.

procured supplies from Dongxing that ended up mainly in Hong Kong and Canton.<sup>177</sup> There were more distant sources. Persia was an occasional alternative used by certain smuggling organizations.<sup>178</sup>

Hong Kong often acted solely as a staging post toward more distant destinations and was a true hub for the opium traffic in South China, playing a primary role in relaying the drug toward the trade circuits that reached more distant markets in Shanghai, Southeast Asia, the Philippines, and the West Coast of the United States.<sup>179</sup> Thus, opium consignments easily blended into intense flows of goods. Hong Kong had another special interest for opium traffickers: it had a broken coastline that could not be properly monitored. The sampans used by the smugglers were impossible to distinguish from the fishing boats and trading vessels, and their crews easily outwitted the few patrols that went after them.<sup>180</sup>

The smuggling gangs also benefitted from the geographical position and political conditions of two other territories: Macao and Guangzhouwan.

Macao too took on the role of a nerve center for the opium traffickers. The Macao authorities paid no attention to the management of the trade and did little to hamper it. Unlike Hong Kong, however, Macao was not a major international port. In fact, it was not so much a point of transit for raw opium as a center for producing chests of prepared opium. The importance of Macao in this sector was based on the huge success of certain brands, which, as we have seen, increasingly used Chinese opium.<sup>181</sup> After transiting, often through Hong Kong, the chests of prepared opium from Macao went to distant markets like Manila, Singapore, and San Francisco.<sup>182</sup>

The French leasehold territory of Guangzhouwan developed in a similar way, although the opium there was administered by an Opium

<sup>177</sup> MAE, Série Asie 1918–29, Sous-série affaires communes, file no. 59, French translation of a League of Nations report dated 29 November 1926 on the opium traffic in Hong Kong.

<sup>178</sup> Guangdong Province Archives, series no. 95/1, file no. 1172, report by the Superintendent of Imports and Exports in Hong Kong dated 7 August 1923 on a contraband organization discovered at No. 5 Shing Street, Hong Kong; SDN/LON, file S196, superintendent of Imports and Exports in Hong Kong for the year 1926.

<sup>179</sup> FO 415, report by the Hong Kong Government to Harcourt dated 3 December 1912; FO 415, report by the British consul in Canton dated 27 June 1921.

<sup>180</sup> MAE, Série Asie 1930–40, file no. 115, letter dated 20 August 1936 from the French Consulate in Hong Kong to the French Embassy in London dated 20 August 1936.

<sup>181</sup> These brands have been mentioned in my description of Macao as a supplier of Indian opium to Canton in the period 1910–1920.

<sup>182</sup> FO 228/336, report by the commissioner of Maritime Customs, Lappa, on 14 June 1921; FO 228/337, report from the Hong Kong Government to the CO on 15 November 1926; FO 415, letter from Hayley Bell to Sir Aglen dated 14 June 1921.

Authority from 1914 onward.<sup>183</sup> Guangzhouwan in the 1910s and 1920s received five hundred chests of Indian opium per year.<sup>184</sup> But actually, once these chests had been auctioned off to registered Chinese companies, the authority had no control whatsoever over their fate.<sup>185</sup> The internal market of this colony, which was extremely limited, absorbed only a very small part of legally imported Indian opium. The major part, whose volumes were swelled by illicitly imported quantities (often with the benevolent indifference of the authorities), was re-exported by Chinese opium boilers to southern China.<sup>186</sup> Prepared opium was also massively re-exported to and via Hong Kong.<sup>187</sup> Famous brands were produced there by traffickers for export, among them the “Two Ks” (Kung Kei) brand and the Chenfuji brand, in boxes depicting two lions.<sup>188</sup> However, the traffickers also took to counterfeiting the most famous brands from Macao.<sup>189</sup>

The year 1927 was a major turning point in the geography of smuggling. There were changes that owed much to action by the British government. The British had been concerned by the way in which the Hong Kong monopoly was being choked off by the smugglers. Their action and these changes affected the region’s two main suppliers of illicit prepared opium. First, the British government in India stopped supplying opium to Macao. This was a hard blow because the possibility of clandestine re-exports of Indian opium had been one of Macao’s main advantages for the smuggling sector.<sup>190</sup> In addition, the Macao “opium farm system” was abolished. Opium thereafter came under a public monopoly, and this pushed the authorities to keep a far closer watch on the smuggling gangs.

<sup>183</sup> Vannière, “Le territoire à bail de Guangzhouwan,” 414–415.

<sup>184</sup> SDN/LON, file S196, interview with J. D. Lloyd on 13, 14, 15, 16 January 1930, 76; see also Vannière, “Le territoire à bail de Guangzhouwan,” 199.

<sup>185</sup> SDN/LON, file S196, interview with J. D. Lloyd on 13, 14, 15, 16 January 1930, 78. On this system and its development in the 1910s, see Vannière, “Le territoire à bail de Guangzhouwan,” 417–427, 444–447, and 501–510.

<sup>186</sup> FO 228/2457, report to the FO dated 9 February 1914. An enlightening article by Vannière describes the interested benevolence of the administration toward the groups of Chinese merchants trafficking in opium (“Guangzhouwan et la question du commerce de l’opium de 1900 à 1939, état de la recherche,” *Approches Asie* 18 [2003]: 85–109).

<sup>187</sup> Guangdong Province Archives, series no. 94/1, file no. 2236, report dated 7 August 1923 by the Hong Kong Superintendent of Imports and Exports on a smuggling organization discovered at 5, Wing Shing Street in Hong Kong.

<sup>188</sup> SDN/LON, file S196, report for 1926 by the Hong Kong superintendent of Imports and Exports; Liang Guowu, “Wu Tiecheng tongzhi Guangdong shiqi ‘jinyan’ heimu,” 130–134; Vannière, “Le territoire à bail de Guangzhouwan,” 439.

<sup>189</sup> SDN/LON, file S196, interview with J. D. Lloyd on 13, 14, 15, 16 January 1930, 76.

<sup>190</sup> Gunn Geoffrey, *Encountering Macau*, 83–87; FO 228/3371, report by the Hong Kong Government to the CO dated 15 November 1926.

Then, toward the end of the 1920s, Guangzhouwan yielded to pressure that the British authorities had been exerting for many years and significantly (but temporarily) tightened the screws on the smugglers.<sup>191</sup> In 1927, Guangzhouwan ceased to be the main source of illicit opium confiscated by the Hong Kong Customs.<sup>192</sup> Guangzhouwan's difficulties were aggravated by action by the Maritime Customs, which set up a belt of surveillance stations around the territory at the beginning of the 1930s.<sup>193</sup> Thereafter, contraband opium destined for Hong Kong tended to travel through Wuzhou. This new importance of a Chinese port in the clandestine circuits of opium in the region was symbolic of the decline of Macao and Guangzhouwan, which ultimately gave in to British pressure.

The extent to which Canton seemed to be eclipsed by the importance of Hong Kong, Macao, and Guangzhouwan in this geography of the smuggling game and in this broader geographical framework needs to be emphasized. The capital of Guangdong Province was little more than a center of consumption and redistribution toward its own hinterland. Less visibly, however, it acted as a source of capital, since the wealthy stratum of the city's merchants played a fairly active part in the organization of the opium traffic.

### *The Big Gangs*

Our main sources of information on international smuggling organizations are the reports of investigations by the Hong Kong Customs and police. Naturally, they shed scanty light on the question. This is a classic problem for historians seeking to write about the fringes of society. However, the information from the Hong Kong departments is useful.

The variety and scale of the activity by the gangs of traffickers that this information reveals is striking. These gangs brought together merchants often set up in regions at great distances from one another, like one organization in the mid-1920s that was a grouping of merchants from Macao, Jiangmen, Hong Kong, Canton, and Shanghai.<sup>194</sup>

The term "international," however, might be something of a misnomer. These gangs were international only because they linked up spaces coming

<sup>191</sup> On this question, see the correspondence filed in the following file of the MAE, Série Asie 1918–29, Sous-série affaires communes, files 59, 60 and 61; Vannière, "Le territoire à bail de Guangzhouwan," 426 and 501–510.

<sup>192</sup> SDN/LON, file S196, report for 1928 by the Hong Kong superintendent of Imports and Exports.

<sup>193</sup> Vannière, "Le territoire à bail de Guangzhouwan," 485.

<sup>194</sup> Aix, affaires politiques, file no. 3445, report for 1926 by the Hong Kong Superintendent of Imports and Exports on opium smuggling in Hong Kong.

under different sovereignties. Their members were almost always Chinese only, even if they did occasionally use British or Portuguese aliases in order to keep their ships protected by foreign flags.<sup>195</sup> Their internal organization and their cohesion often stemmed from family and native-place loyalties. Thus, individuals from the Shantou region are often mentioned in the reports.<sup>196</sup> Similarly, one society active in the mid-1920s consisted only of people from the Hakka ethnic group originating from Shantou.<sup>197</sup> Another organization, set up in the mid-1930s, consisted solely of people from the Chaozhou and Shantou regions.<sup>198</sup> This perhaps could have resulted from the expertise gained in the previous century when merchants from this region dominated the opium circuits from Canton to Shanghai.<sup>199</sup>

Certain documents confiscated by the Hong Kong Customs, which are sometimes in a secret code very difficult to decipher, suggest that the operations would be conducted in repeated cycles across the production and supply chain: a trafficker or group of traffickers would accompany the product from its procurement up to its end destination and then commence the cycle all over again. The clandestine market was clearly very competitive. The prices applied by the different monopolies in Guangdong were fairly modest in the 1920s and 1930s. Profitability was therefore assured only by the quantities sold. Even in Hong Kong, the favorable situation of high prices dictated by monopoly led to fierce competition in the smuggled opium market and ultimately dragged prices downward. Whatever the final destination, therefore, real profit margins stayed fairly low.<sup>200</sup>

The rapidity of the cycles went in tandem with the small amounts of capital invested in these enterprises. Storage was dangerous and costly and used only as a last resort. The opium consignments were financed not only by the funds collected by the organizations themselves but also through commission from sales.<sup>201</sup> Another more unexpected source of profit came from the fact that the money collected could often be increased

<sup>195</sup> Guangdong Province Archives, series 95/1, file 1172, report by the Hong Kong Superintendent of Imports and Exports on 7 August 1923.

<sup>196</sup> *Judu yuekan* 97 (February 1936): 19.

<sup>197</sup> SDN/LON, file R785, League of Nations report in November 1926.

<sup>198</sup> *Judu yuekan* 108 (January 1937): 8–10.

<sup>199</sup> Trocki, *Opium, Empire*, 119; Zheng Yingshi, “Chaoji yapianshang zai Shanghai de huodongji qi yu Jiang Jieshi zhengquan de guanxi” [The activities of opium merchants from Chaozhou in Shanghai and their links with Chiang Kai-shek’s regime], in *Guangdong wenshi ziliao* [Historical materials on Guangdong] (Canton: Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi, Guangdongsheng weiyuanhui wenshi ziliao yanjiu weiyuanhui, 1965), 21:7–10.

<sup>200</sup> SDN/LON, file R784, report by J. D. Lloyd dated 12 December 1923.

<sup>201</sup> SDN/LON, file R784, report by J. D. Lloyd dated 12 December 1923; SDN/LON, file S196, report by the Hong Kong superintendent of Imports and Exports for 1926.



by playing on exchange rates between the different currencies used at the various steps of the circuit.<sup>202</sup>

Finally, the need to sell stocks fast and at suitable prices explains the careful attention paid to detailed and up-to-date information on conditions in the different potential markets. The internal correspondence of these organizations, confiscated by the police, point to a constant search for the best outlets.<sup>203</sup> It must not be imagined that these organizations of opium traffickers were highly integrated and aspired to control the entire circuit from the poppy fields of Yunnan up to the clandestine smoking rooms of Hong Kong. On the contrary, adaptability and collaboration were the rule. Opium changed hands many times between the time of its harvesting and that of its final consumption. The nature of the sources that focus on Hong Kong are such that we have detailed information only on the organizations that transported opium between the point of exit from the production zones and Hong Kong itself. Upstream, the purchasing was done through agents in Dongxing, Guangzhouwan, Beihai, Jiangmen, Wuzhou, or Haiphong. Downstream, the retail trade was left either to members of the organization or to companies or individuals who purchased the goods.<sup>204</sup> It was always personal ties that underpinned and secured the relationships with these indispensable partners. At other times, the traffickers' organizations took shares in local companies. There can be little doubt besides that certain consignments of clandestine opium actually came from legal circuits in the opium-producing provinces. Conversely, other illicit consignments entered the legal circuits in the consumption areas thanks to the interested benevolence of official personalities.<sup>205</sup>

Protean in its form, taking advantage of the existence of territories (Macao, Guangzhouwan) that tolerated it, yet flexible with unfailing adaptability and vitality: such was the nature of opium smuggling in South China. Far from being an epiphenomenon, it was one of the major structural facts of the opium question in the region. The smuggling organizations throughout this period proved to be highly efficient in supplying the great markets of the cities on the Guangdong coast. They therefore exerted constant pressure on the Canton-based official monopolies. In particular, they prevented these monopolies from raising prices for fear of suffering the fate of the Hong Kong monopoly, which had been unable

<sup>202</sup> FO 228/3370, report by the governor of Hong Kong dated 23 July 1926.

<sup>203</sup> MAE, Série Asie 1918–29, file no. 59, report by J. D. Lloyd on a gang of drug traffickers discovered at 5, Wing Shing Street, second floor, on the premises of the Wing Tai Steamship Co., letters no. 11 and 83.

<sup>204</sup> Guangdong Province Archives, série 95/1, file 1172, report by the Hong Kong Superintendent of Imports and Exports, 7 August 1923.

<sup>205</sup> SDN/LON, file R784, report by J. D. Lloyd dated 12 December 1923.



(for political reasons) to adapt sale prices to pressure from the clandestine circuits and was asphyxiated by smuggling in the 1920s.<sup>206</sup> Thus the Hong Kong Opium Monopoly, based in a city with a population (850,000) barely smaller than that of Canton in 1931, was able in that whole year to deliver only six-and-a-half tonnes of prepared opium, a quantity that corresponded approximately to the amount consumed (legally) in Canton in just one month.<sup>207</sup>

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The material approach to the opium question has shown the complexity of a product, the varieties of which were distributed in a well-established hierarchy. Taking opium was an act far more demanding and elaborate than the mere lighting of a cigarette. It was governed by a fairly complex ritual that required the smoker to remain reclined. It mobilized his time and called for the use of relatively sophisticated equipment. For certain wealthy smokers, this meant possessing a full panoply of luxury items associated with extreme refinement. The technique of cooking and shaping the opium pellets called for a degree of dexterity that could only be acquired after a fairly lengthy noviceship.

However, there were simplified modes of consumption, like that of *yantiao*, which did away with some of these constraints. While many regions of China saw novel substances such as morphine and heroin replace opium, itself handicapped by the constraints related to its modes of consumption, it is the widespread use of *yantiao* in Canton that explains why the use of these new substances remained remarkably limited in that city.

The period under study saw decisive changes in the opium circuits. In particular, at the beginning of the 1920s, the provinces of southwestern China asserted themselves as almost exclusive suppliers of raw opium in Guangdong—to the detriment of Indian opium. Indian opium was no longer in the game: a 150-year cycle during which it had flooded China ended exactly as it had begun, as a trickle of illicit imports of a commodity considered to be a luxury.

At the end of the Qing dynasty and during the first years of the Republic, opium (then essentially Indian opium) had attained very high prices. After 1920, that Yunnan and Guizhou proved to be capable of supplying

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<sup>206</sup> In 1927, Governor Clementi tried to lower the sales price of officially distributed opium but was soon called to order by the Foreign Office (CO 129/510/8, letter from the Hong Kong Government to the CO on 12 January 1928); FO 371/13254, report by the governor of Hong Kong dated 4 April 1928.

<sup>207</sup> *Report of the Government of Hong Kong for the Calendar Year 1931 on the Traffic in Opium and Dangerous Drugs* (Hong Kong: Noronha and Cie, n.d.); Miners, *Hong Kong under Imperial Rule*, 21.

abundant quantities of opium led to a sharp drop in prices at Canton. Even though the years 1920–1926 were a period of cheap opium as compared with the previous two decades, the fact remains that this was a highly taxed commodity and that even after 1920 the regular consumption of opium was a major expense for an individual with a modest income. The success of *yantiao* reflected this fact because its very moderate price brought it within the range of all. The inexhaustible activity of the smugglers, whose vitality and organizational qualities have been seen, also reflects this relative dearness of opium. The clandestine smoking rooms where illicit opium could be consumed were another alternative offering opium to the less well-off smoker.

## TWO

# Opium Eradication as a Feasible Goal, 1906–1923

Apart from Lin Zexu's short-lived attempt to stop opium consumption in 1839, the late-Qing attitude toward the narcotic was one of laxity that ended only in 1906 with the inception of an ambitious and realistic policy of eradication, conducted with resolve throughout China until the fall of the empire. The national government that emerged from the 1911 Revolution vowed immediately to pursue the same goals. In Guangdong, the new authorities were particularly zealous. The warlord Long Jiguang, who became master of the province in the summer of 1913, followed essentially the same course, and it was two years before he was able to legalize the narcotic. Following in his footsteps, the leaders of the Old Guangxi Clique allowed opium sales, but without making an official policy of it. However, by 1920, the federalist Chen Jiongming had resumed a policy of resolute hostility to opium in which he remained inflexible until his downfall at the beginning of 1923.

The policies put through in the years 1906–1922 were much varied on the surface but show an underlying unity. That opium could be eliminated continued to be a feasible goal. Even when the authorities turned a blind eye to opium traffic and even when they organized the traffic themselves, they did not dare set up an official opium monopoly—with the exception of Long Jiguang. This first part of the study into official approaches to the opium question shows real continuity despite the change in regime that came about in 1912.

### **The High Tide of the Fight against Opium, 1906–1913**

The year 1906 was a milestone in the history of the opium trade. The launching of the Ten-Year Plan initiated a period of intense nationwide struggle—with spectacular results.

*Imperial Policy*

The rising tide of public opinion in favor of opium prohibition naturally impelled the Qing authorities to take action.<sup>1</sup> However, the campaign against the consumption and production of opium also formed part of a broader framework of reforms (*Xinzheng*) introduced by the government from January 1901 onward with the aim of modernizing and strengthening imperial power.<sup>2</sup>

Two Anglo-Chinese diplomatic agreements in 1907 and 1911 loosened the shackles imposed by massive imports of Indian opium and hence, though not strictly speaking part of these policies, played a decisive role in creating the conditions for the success of the plan.

## The Anglo-Chinese Agreements of 1907 and 1911

In the agreement of 1907, the British government undertook to gradually reduce and terminate opium exports from India within ten years in return for guarantees by the Chinese to reduce poppy production within the empire.<sup>3</sup> The agreement was to be reviewed and renegotiated after three years in light of the progress made by the Chinese government in curbing opium production within the country.<sup>4</sup> This treaty came into force on 1 January 1908 and saw British exports to China reduced at a rate of 5,100 chests per year.<sup>5</sup>

By 1911, the Chinese stood on the high ground, such was the unquestionable progress they had made in holding to their commitments—much to the surprise of the British.<sup>6</sup> A new agreement signed on 8 May 1911 set up a system of certificates for stricter control over exports of Indian opium to China.<sup>7</sup> The chests now had to be sealed in India itself in the presence

<sup>1</sup> Thomas David Reins, "Reform, Nationalism, and Internationalism: The Opium Suppression Movement in China and the Anglo-Saxon Influence, 1900–1908," *Modern Asian Studies* 25, no. 1 (1991): 101–142; Kathleen Lodwick, *Crusaders against Opium: Protestant Missionaries in China, 1874–1917* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 117–137.

<sup>2</sup> Su Zhiliang, *Zhongguo dupin shi*, 204; Wang Hongbin, *Jindu shijian*, 268–269. For a general description of social transformation in China in the last days of the Qing dynasty, see Marianne Bastid, *L'évolution de la société chinoise à la fin de la dynastie des Qing* (Paris: EHESS, 1979).

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed description of the genesis and content of the 1907 and 1911 agreements and of all the negotiations and agreements made in this period, c.f. R. K. Newman, "India and the Anglo-Chinese Opium Agreement, 1907–1914," *Modern Asian Studies* 23, no. 3 (July 1989): 525–560.

<sup>4</sup> Yu Ende, *Zhongguo jinyan faling*, 121.

<sup>5</sup> Su Zhiliang, *Zhongguo dupin shi*, 211–212; Gregory Blue, "Opium for China: The British Connection," in Timothy Brook, *Opium Regimes*, 41.

<sup>6</sup> Newman, "India and the Anglo-Chinese Opium Agreement," 546–547.

<sup>7</sup> For the complete text in English of the 1911 agreement, see FO file 228/2444.

of a Chinese official and had to be given numbered export permits (Article 8). The number of chests was to be reduced at the rate stipulated in the 1907 agreement and touch zero by 1917 (Article 8). The exports could be terminated before 1917 in any province where it could be proven to agents of the British government that poppy cultivation had been eradicated and that no Chinese opium was coming into that province (Article 3). One clause in Article 3 specified nonetheless that imports of Indian opium would be allowed up to the very end in the ports of Shanghai and Canton, even if it turned out that opium had disappeared from the provinces in which these two ports were located. This clause, on the face of it surprising, can be explained by the importance of these two ports in the transit of raw opium toward interior provinces. Thus, if conditions in Guangdong and Jiangsu were to develop differently from conditions in their hinterland provinces (taken in a very broad sense), then British merchants would be deprived of two vital gateways for their opium. The Chinese government was also allowed to raise taxes on imported opium provided that Chinese opium was taxed in equal measure (Article 6). Under the Chefoo (Zhifu) Convention ratified by the British in 1885, each chest had been taxed 110 taels at the port of entry and was exempt from the *likin*.<sup>8</sup> This amount was now raised to 350 taels.<sup>9</sup>

The only Indian imports covered by the certificate system were those whose final destination was China proper. Opium for local consumption in colonies such as Macao, Guangzhouwan, Hong Kong, or Indochina was “noncertified.” Unlike certified opium, it was not covered by any annual reduction clause, which explains why its price did not rise like that of certified opium. Thus, on 2 August 1912, the price of certified opium reached an average of 5,594 rupees per chest, whereas noncertified opium fetched only 1,847 rupees a chest.<sup>10</sup> Chests of Indian opium could thus be purchased quite legally in Calcutta and, after making a detour through another country, be redispached to China as contraband and fetch high profits.

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<sup>8</sup> The *likin* (*lijin* in the pinyin transcription) was a complex system of internal customs set up as of 1853 to finance military operations against the Taiping Rebels. A consignment could be taxed at different points on its route between its place of production and that of its final consumption. The local authorities set the tax rate, which could vary according to the merchandise.

<sup>9</sup> Miners, *Hong Kong under Imperial Rule*, 219–221.

<sup>10</sup> Aix, Affaires politiques, file no. 2425/2, MAE report to the minister for the Colonies, 18 September 1912.

### The Ten-Year Plan

An edict on 20 September 1906 proclaimed a policy of elimination spread over ten years. The ten-article regulation that followed on 1 November spelled out the modalities of this policy.<sup>11</sup> The plan proposed combined action against both supply and demand. The regulation stipulated that lands given over to poppy cultivation would be reduced by one-tenth every year. Planting poppy on land where it had not been hitherto cultivated was banned with immediate effect (Article 1). As for consumption, local authorities were required to register smokers and enforce the regular and constant reduction of consumption. Opium consumption was restricted to permit-holders (Articles 2 and 3). The opium houses for their part were given fairly short notice to close down and the only establishments tolerated were the opium shops. These came under stringent checks and controls and were of course required to play a part in the programmed reduction of consumption (Articles 4 and 5). This anti-opium offensive was also based on the assumption that the elites would set an example: while the common people were allowed ten years to quit smoking, officials and teachers (below sixty years of age) and students had only six months in which to do so (Article 9). The imperial government encouraged the setting up of appropriate local associations provided that they limited their activity to combating opium (Article 9).<sup>12</sup>

In Guangdong, the response to the orders from Peking was both serious and resolute. The opium houses were closed on 9 August 1907 when the six-month deadline announced by the governor came to an end. It was henceforth also forbidden to assist and abet smokers in restaurants, teahouses, and other public places, on penalty of fines and imprisonment. The mandatory annual permits that all smokers had to carry were printed on conspicuously bulky wooden plates designed to create a sense of shame in the smoker as he traveled to his vendor. The vendor would have to put a stamp on the permit whenever the smoker came to purchase his

<sup>11</sup> The text of the regulation is in Ma Mozhen, *Zhongguo jindu shi ziliao, 1729–1949* [Materials for the history of the prohibition of drugs in China] (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 1998), 399–401.

<sup>12</sup> An interesting analogy can be drawn with the project for the compilation of local customs initiated by the imperial government in 1908. Here, too, the need to seek support from the local elites and the utility of constituting appropriate associations are specified in the corresponding edict: Jérôme Bourgon, "Rights, Freedom, and Customs in the Making of Chinese Civil Law, 1900–1936," in William Kirby, ed., *Realms of Freedom in Modern China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 97.

dose of prepared opium. Smokers were required to smoke only at home. Even there, smoking in groups was forbidden.<sup>13</sup>

The enthusiasm of the Cantonese elites in the fight against opium was nothing short of remarkable.<sup>14</sup> Their activities were organized around an association, the Guangdong jieyan zonghui (Guangdong Anti-Opium Association), founded with the encouragement of the province's governor, who himself drew up the bylaw.<sup>15</sup> The official inauguration of this association, which coincided with the closure of the opium houses, was marked by festivities, as reported by Rozier (a French Customs inspector in Indochina who was in Hong Kong and Canton on official business in the autumn of 1907):

The anti-opium society, set up on solid foundations, was inaugurated with great pomp on the very day that the opium houses were closed. If the Cantonese press is to be believed, this day will go down in the city's history. . . . The theatres played scenes prepared for the occasion in which the smokers were ridiculed and scorned and were the butt of all the wit that the creators of these shows could muster. Processions, organized at great expense, went through the main streets of the town. They depicted opium smokers in dress that provoked the pity and disgust of the spectators, thus attempting to strike the imagination of the populace.<sup>16</sup>

The Guangdong jieyan zonghui had 287 founding members, among them some big businessmen. The locale chosen for the society's headquarters, near the Hualin Temple, in the heart of the Xiguan business district, clearly showed the predominant influence of the merchants.<sup>17</sup>

Many of the association's members, including the most active among them, belonged to other benevolent associations as well.<sup>18</sup> The associa-

<sup>13</sup> *Dongfang zazhi* [Eastern miscellany] 6, no. 4 (May 1909); FO 228/1694, intelligence report for the quarter ended 30 September 1908; FO 228/1757, intelligence report for the quarter ended 31 December 1909, intelligence report for Canton, March quarter 1910. See also the very detailed report by the French consul in Canton dated 13 February 1908: MAE, Nouvelle série, Sous-série Chine, file no. 587.

<sup>14</sup> *L'écho de Chine*, 9 April 1908; Aix, GGI 43002, report by Hardouin dated 15 December 1907.

<sup>15</sup> Aix, GGI 43019, report by Rozier dated 12 October 1907: "Étude sur la question de l'opium en Extrême Orient" [Study on the opium question in the Far East], 21–22. Apparently, other anti-opium associations emerged, but their activities were far less important and none received official blessings as did the Guangdong jieyan zonghui.

<sup>16</sup> Aix, GGI 43019, Rozier, "Étude sur la question de l'opium en Extrême Orient," 27–28.

<sup>17</sup> Archives of Guangdong Province, series no. 1/482 (Canton Maritime Customs), file no. 672–674, Decennial report 1902–1911; Liu Fujing and Wang Mingkun, *Jiu Guangdong yan-duchang*, 48.

<sup>18</sup> Deng Yusheng, *Quanyue shehui shilu* [Situation report on society in Guangdong] (Canton Diaocha quanyue shehui chubanshe, 1911), n.p.

tion's president, the banker Chen Huipu, was also manager of the Fangbian hospital and a founder of Chongzheng, another of the city's main charitable organizations.<sup>19</sup> Some months later, he became president of the new Zizhihui (Local Autonomy Association), the merchants' organization whose actions in support of constitutional government and national revival strongly marked the period 1907–1911.<sup>20</sup> The case of Chen Huipu clearly shows that collective action against opium was part of a much vaster movement in Canton and throughout China at the end of the Qing dynasty. It points to a new trend in which merchants came together in charitable associations not based on geographic origin or type of economic activity.<sup>21</sup> As opposed to the traditional guild model based on regional and/or vocational solidarities alone, this fundamentally changed mode of merchant organization stemmed from the emergence of a protonationalism that in turn explains this new concern with the public good. This type of association was also an excellent way for them to acquire some prestige as well as a political role, while at the same time creating networks that transcended the usual regional rivalries.<sup>22</sup> The state besides greatly encouraged this movement by giving subsidies to the associations and bestowing honors on their most eminent members.<sup>23</sup>

The bylaws of the Guangdong jieyan zonghui give a good idea of the nature and extent of its activity.<sup>24</sup> They clearly present the association as an offspring of the famous grouping of nine charity halls (the *jiu shantang*) along with the chamber of commerce and the city's seventy-two guilds.<sup>25</sup> The association was meant to help the government implement its anti-opium policy without concerning itself with other matters (Articles 1 and 2). As an instrument of official policy, the association naturally received official support in different ways. It was funded through public subscription, payments from charitable organizations, and official subsidies (Articles

<sup>19</sup> *Guangzhoushi diyi renmin yiyuan yuanzhi* [Annals of People's Hospital No. 1 of Canton City] (Canton: Guangzhoushi feiying lixing chubanshe, 1999), 3.

<sup>20</sup> Liu Fujing and Wang Mingkun, *Jiu Guangdong yanduchang*, 48; Edward Rhoads, "Merchants Associations in Canton, 1895–1911," in Mark Elvin and William Skinner, eds., *The Chinese City between Two Worlds* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974), 110 and 116; Tsin, *Nation, Governance, and Modernity*, 33–37.

<sup>21</sup> On this question, see Raymond Lum's Ph.D. dissertation: "Philanthropy and Public Welfare in Late Imperial China," Harvard University, 1985.

<sup>22</sup> Tsin, *Nation, Governance, and Modernity*, 34–37.

<sup>23</sup> Yeung, "Guangzhou, 1800–1925," 175–181; Tsin, *Nation, Governance, and Modernity*, 25, 29.

<sup>24</sup> Aix, GGI 43019, appendix to report by Rozier, "Etude sur la question de l'opium en Extrême Orient."

<sup>25</sup> On the founding and activity of these two associations, c.f. Rhoads, "Merchants Associations in Canton," 104–106.



15 and 16).<sup>26</sup> After some negotiation, the association was allocated a sum of more than \$20,000 remaining on the books of the Society for the Boycott of American Goods. The members who went back to their villages to carry out propaganda work were placed under official protection, and the association could seek official assistance if needed (Article 6).<sup>27</sup> It had an official seal from the viceroy, which meant that they could make checks in cooperation with the police (Article 2). The bylaws also gave detailed accounts of the rewards bestowed on members of the association and on generous donors. These ranged from simple certificates to solemn and official honors such as *paifang* (commemorative arches) that the governor could propose to the throne (Articles 17 to 26). This was a symbolic reward to the association's most zealous members for their active participation in the anti-opium campaign.

The decisions were taken during the members' weekly meetings and carried out by the president, the vice president, and the association's ten employees (Articles 37–44). The society saw itself in the vanguard of the struggle against opium consumption. It took charge of various activities such as propaganda (Article 7) and the manufacture and free distribution of anti-addiction pills to the poor (Articles 8–10).<sup>28</sup> Twenty members of the association were specially assigned to seeking out clandestine opium houses and other forms of law infringement.<sup>29</sup> The Rozier report described the members as being persevering and energetic.

The association opened a detoxification clinic in the Baozi Temple (situated, like the association's headquarters, in Xiguan). A copy of its bylaws, which found its way into French archives, provides information on this establishment, which was one of the association's most remarkable achievements. It consisted of three buildings and was reserved for destitute smokers of all ages, both men and women. They received free food, medical treatment, and detoxification remedies prepared in the clinic itself. They were admitted into the clinic provided they had a guarantor who would take charge of them when they left and who would be responsible if they relapsed into their addiction. The patients' time was taken up with treatment and physical activity, the latter during the coolest time of day. They took part in daily discussion groups and had to read a newspaper. The number of staff in the clinic cannot be established with precision, but there were in any case more than twenty-five employees.<sup>30</sup> There

<sup>26</sup> Liu Fujing and Wang Mingkun, *Jiu Guangdong yanduchang*, 48; Maritime Customs, *Returns of Trade and Trade Reports for the Year 1907*, Canton Trade Report, 483.

<sup>27</sup> Rozier, "Etude sur la question de l'opium en Extrême Orient," 24, 27–29.

<sup>28</sup> Aix, GGI 43019; the hospital regulations are in the same file.

<sup>29</sup> Deng Yusheng, *Quanyue shehui shilu*, n.p.

<sup>30</sup> Aix, GGI 43019, appendix to report by Rozier, "Etude sur la question de l'opium en

is unfortunately no information on the number of smokers who passed through this clinic.

The Guangdong jieyan zonghui did not limit its activity to Canton but opened branches in the rest of the province.<sup>31</sup> At the beginning of the second decade of the twentieth century, there were branches in Foshan, Xiangshan, and Heyuan.<sup>32</sup>

The case of Guangdong wholly corroborates Joyce Madancy's findings in her monograph on Fujian, where the same processes were at work: a determined administration working with enthusiastic local elites organized in associations that received tokens of consideration in return for active zeal. The case of these two provinces of coastal China can be contrasted with the example of Sichuan, where Judith Wyman has noted that, while spectacular results were obtained, the role of the elites proved to be practically insignificant.<sup>33</sup> It would be therefore tempting to draw a contrast between coastal provinces open to new ideas, where poppy cultivation was hardly developed, and interior provinces like Sichuan where opium was a prime economic resource and where, given the minor role played by Indian opium, eradication of the narcotic could not be part of any anti-imperialistic crusade. But of course, this tentative and insufficiently substantiated typology needs to be confirmed by other regional studies.

The results of the 1906 plan in Guangdong are telling. Between 1906 and 1910, the number of wholesale dealers in raw opium in the province fell from 2,051 to 1,346.<sup>34</sup> The International Opium Commission that met in Shanghai in February 1909<sup>35</sup> recorded very substantial drops in consumption in Canton and in the other main cities of Guangdong.<sup>36</sup> On the eve of the 1911 Revolution, it was believed by one and all that the eradication of

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Extrême Orient."

<sup>31</sup> Liu Fujing and Wang Mingkun, *Jiu Guangdong yanduchang*, 49–50; Edward Rhoads, *China's Republican Revolution: The Case of Kwangtung, 1895–1913* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 124.

<sup>32</sup> Deng Yusheng, *Quanyue shehui shilu*, n.p.

<sup>33</sup> Judith Wyman, "Opium and the State in Late-Qing Sichuan," in Brook, *Opium Regimes*, 213.

<sup>34</sup> *Shenbao*, 24 January 1911; MAE, Nouvelle série, Sous-série Chine, file no. 589, report by De Margerie, minister of France in China to MAE dated 12 October 1910. Both these sources cite the report sent by the provincial authorities to the Throne in the summer of 1910.

<sup>35</sup> This thirteen-nation commission was an American initiative. Its purpose was to examine policies for the elimination of narcotics. It did not amount to much but paved the way for the great international conferences that followed World War I.

<sup>36</sup> International Opium Commission, *Report of the International Opium Commission* (Shanghai: North China Daily News, 1909), 63–65 and 72–76.

opium was making very good progress. Applied intelligently, the chosen method was fetching results—and at low cost to the state.<sup>37</sup>

*The Revolutionaries at Work: Appropriation of the Anti-Opium Struggle*

Although the first Ten-Year Plan had not been steered by any centralizing organization and although its application had depended largely on the officials in the different provinces,<sup>38</sup> the end of empire could well have jeopardized the anti-opium policy's continuance.

In Guangdong, the revolutionaries took power in November 1911 acting under the aegis of Hu Hanmin. A number of steps marked a break with the old order, among them the adoption of the Gregorian calendar and the highly symbolic prohibition of the pigtail, which had been a sign of submission to the Qing.<sup>39</sup> With opium however, the revolutionaries were strongly in favor of immediate eradication. The combat therefore intensified but at the same time changed in two ways: first, the new authorities gave up the idea of working through the associations and took the campaign into their own hands; second, they resorted to greater repression.

Direct Control of Operations

The direct appropriation of the anti-opium movement by the revolutionary government was part of a broader trend in which the political authorities extended the ambit of their action, penetrating areas that had hitherto been the preserve of the charitable organizations.<sup>40</sup> The actions of the famous Chen Jinghua are typical: in 1912 and 1913 Chen Jinghua transferred an unprecedented range of responsibilities to the Canton police (Guangdong shenghui jingchating), of which he was the director.<sup>41</sup> The police opened an orphanage as well as a refuge for former *muitsai* (slave girls); henceforth, the condition and status of the *muitsai* was banned by

<sup>37</sup> Zhu Qingbao, *Yapian yu jindai Zhongguo*, 346; Liu Fujing and Wang Mingkun, *Jiu Guangdong yanduchang*, 50. Among the many sources that confirm the successes in Guangdong are *The Chinese Recorder*, July 1911, 389; MAE, Nouvelle série, Sous-série Chine, file no. 589, report dated 18 November 1910 by Brenier, consulting inspector for agriculture and trade, to Klobukowski, governor-general of Indochina.

<sup>38</sup> This does not mean however that Peking did not verify the results sent from the different regions of the empire through secret inspections, such as those conducted in the spring of 1910 (Madancy, *The Troublesome Legacy*, 131–132).

<sup>39</sup> Yang Wanxiu, *Guangzhou jianshi*, 355–359.

<sup>40</sup> Yeung, "Guangzhou, 1800–1925," 195–198.

<sup>41</sup> *Shina* 3, no. 15 (1912): 60–61. The situation in Canton recalls that of Chengdu in the same period. There, the impetus for reform came from Yang Wei, the city's police chief, who used his vast powers to extend the reforms begun under the empire. Yang's role in female emancipation was outstanding: Kristin Stapleton, *Civilizing Chengdu: Chinese Urban Reform, 1895–1937* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 186–205.

the government.<sup>42</sup> In the same way, Chen Jinghua gradually took over the management of all opium-related matters.

His arrival did not immediately follow the overthrow of the imperial administration. An initial period of uncertainty followed the establishment of the revolutionary government. Some opium houses took advantage of the early weeks of confusion at the beginning of the year to re-open their premises.<sup>43</sup> When the situation was stabilized, the authorities decided to act. In April 1912 one Li Qingchun took over as head of a new organization, the Guangdong jieyan zongju (Canton Anti-Opium Bureau). This organization undertook to distribute new permits for smokers valid for only three months.<sup>44</sup> However, the permits were cancelled the very next month and fresh permits were issued, this time by the police.<sup>45</sup>

The growing role of the police was confirmed when Chen Jinghua succeeded Li Qingchun as director of the Canton Anti-Opium Bureau on 1 April 1912 and when the bureau became a simple subdepartment of the police.<sup>46</sup> In February 1913, Chen Jinghua, who could imagine no limits to his scope of action, went so far as to ask the Peking government to grant him special powers for six months to deal with opium-related matters without being required to refer cases to the judiciary. These powers, he pleaded, would make his combat more efficient.<sup>47</sup> It would seem, in any case, that he had already been enjoying these powers since 1912 with Hu Hanmin's blessings alone.<sup>48</sup>

### Vigorous and Repressive Action

Starting with August 1912, the diplomatic sources are agreed on the remarkable and continuously vigorous efforts made by Chen Jinghua against narcotics throughout the province.<sup>49</sup> Clearly enjoying the unlim-

<sup>42</sup> Yeung, "Guangzhou, 1800–1925," 157; *Report of the London Missionary Society, 1914* (the report actually covered 1913), 190–194; *Huaguobao*, 8 January 1914.

<sup>43</sup> Aix, GGI 65400, Canton press reports 1912, translation of an article dated 6 January 1912 from the *Tcheng tan pao*; FO 228/2448, report by the consul in Canton dated 29 May 1912; Maritimes Customs, Returns of Trade and Trade Reports for the Year 1912, Canton Trade Report, 689.

<sup>44</sup> *Yangchengbao*, 10 April 1912; SCMP, 12 April 1912.

<sup>45</sup> *Yangchengbao*, 8 May 1912; FO 228/2448, report by the consul in Canton dated 29 May 1912; FO 228/1846, *Jingchating yanding jinyan guize* [Police regulations on the elimination of opium] dated 8 May 1912 and published in the press.

<sup>46</sup> GGI 65400, French consul's note to the Government-General of Indochina on the revolution in Guangdong, week of 10 to 17 August 1912.

<sup>47</sup> SCMP, 13 March 1913. Peking's response was negative.

<sup>48</sup> *Guangdong gongbao*, no. 113, 12 December 1912, p. 14.

<sup>49</sup> MAE, Nouvelle série, Sous-série Chine, file no. 592, report dated 21 August 1912 from Picot to Poincaré, minister of foreign affairs (Picot quotes from a [now missing] report by the consul in Canton); National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), series no. 679 (Maritime Customs),

ited support of Hu Hanmin, who shared his anti-opium convictions, Chen passed numerous orders to immediately stop poppy cultivation in the province. He carried out large-scale crop destruction. Anyone found cultivating poppy had his lands confiscated. Chen Jinghua also tried to bring some order into the sale of the various remedies proposed against opium addiction, trying to make sure that these remedies did not themselves contain opium and setting up a suitable laboratory for this purpose in the summer of 1912.<sup>50</sup>

On the consumption side, special efforts were made to severely punish soldiers and officials found smoking opium.<sup>51</sup> Chen Jinghua spared no efforts to ban smoking throughout the province but came up against the British wholesalers' attempts, through their diplomatic representatives in Peking, to get the central government to countermand anti-opium regulations adopted in Guangdong in May 1912. These regulations prohibited all consumption of opium from 1913 onward.<sup>52</sup> This, the wholesalers felt, was a de facto violation of the 1907 treaty since it meant prohibiting raw opium imports, which were supposed to continue at the pace laid down in the treaty unless and until poppy cultivation had been eliminated throughout the country.<sup>53</sup> The Canton authorities replied that, while they could not hinder imports of Indian opium under the treaties, they were perfectly entitled to prohibit its consumption. And that is exactly what happened: the total prohibition of opium consumption proclaimed in 1913 was implemented in January.<sup>54</sup> At the same time, imports of raw opium continued, albeit at a less sustained pace. There is a fairly simple

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file no. 32385-32399, correspondence from Canton, letter dated 30 June 1912, letter dated 3 February 1913; FO 415, report from John Jordan to Sir Edward Grey dated 26 May 1913; FO 228/2453, report of the consul in Canton on 13 March 1913; Maritime Customs, Returns of Trade and Trade Reports for the Year 1912, Canton Trade Report, 689.

<sup>50</sup> SCMP, 7 October 1912, 27 June 1912, 22 May 1913; *Guangdong gongbao*, no. 57, 5 October 1912, p. 7; Aix, GGI 65400, French consul's note on the revolution in Guangdong, week 27 July to 3 August 1912; Ma Mozhen, *Dupin zai Zhongguo*, 97.

<sup>51</sup> Zhou Xingliang, "Minchu Guangdong junzhengfu de jinyanjindu douzheng" [The struggle by the Guangdong military government for the prohibition of opium and gambling at the beginning of the Republican period], in Yang Tianshi, ed., *Minguo zhanggu* [Anecdotes from the Republic] (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 1993), 29–30; *Minshengbao*, 4 July 1912; the SCMP dated 12 June 1913 mentions the dismissal of a high-level civil servant found guilty of consuming opium. The man was also sentenced to pay a huge fine.

<sup>52</sup> FO 228/1846, *Jingchating yanding jinyan guize* [Police regulations on the elimination of opium dated 8 May 1912] (published in the press), regulation no. 3.

<sup>53</sup> FO 228/2448, report by the consul in Canton dated 29 May 1912; FO 228/2451 is entirely devoted to this question: see especially Sassoon's telegram to the embassy on 11 November 1912, and Sassoon's letter to Jordan dated 22 November 1912.

<sup>54</sup> Regulations on the prohibition of opium proclaimed on 20 December 1912: FO 228/1846; SCMP, 17 December 1912.

explanation for this paradox: the opium merchants continued to distribute their narcotic in the hinterland where the prohibition of consumption was applied less strictly.<sup>55</sup>

Unsurprisingly, January 1913 was marked by intense activity. Numerous proclamations were made, and strict orders were given to authorities throughout the province. A great many premises were searched, and increases in bonuses and rewards spurred policemen to even greater zeal.<sup>56</sup> In April 1913, Chen tried to systematically jail all opium-related offenders,<sup>57</sup> but it is likely that he came up against logistical problems since the sources report that, even a few weeks later, offenders were still being fined rather than sent to prison—even if the fines in question were huge.<sup>58</sup> Public humiliation was another form of sanction, used to discourage wealthy individuals from smoking opium, and it was hoped that this dissuasive effect would be passed on to the rest of the population.<sup>59</sup> Thus, in March 1913 there were reports of wealthy Cantonese opium smokers being dragged in chains to downtown Canton and being forced to carry out civic cleaning tasks under police surveillance. Another frequent form of action designed to strike the public imagination was the public destruction of opium and confiscated equipment. Chen frequently resorted to this form of action.<sup>60</sup> As for propaganda, unlike the policies applied in the years 1906–1911, the local elites were no longer used as a conduit. It is also worth noting that exemplary measures were no longer seen as a reliable way to make people mend their ways. This notion persisted only in the special severity shown toward opium consumption among officials and wealthy individuals.

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<sup>55</sup> Maritime Customs, Returns of Trade and Trade Reports for the Year 1912, Canton Trade Report, 689; National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), series no. 679 (Maritime Customs), file no. 32385-32399, correspondence from Canton, letter dated 27 August 1913. These sources mention the conveyance and sale of opium in the “interior,” where, they claimed, the regulations were poorly applied. However, they do not clearly say whether this interior included only Guangdong Province. I believe this to be unlikely.

<sup>56</sup> Zhou Xingliang, “Minchu Guangdong junzhengfu,” 29–30; National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), series no. 679 (Maritime Customs), file no. 32385-32399, correspondence from Canton, letter dated 3 February 1913; Aix, GGI 64921, Canton press in 1913: there are numerous articles in various Cantonese newspapers on this frenzy.

<sup>57</sup> SCMP, 2 April 1913, 10 April 1913.

<sup>58</sup> SCMP, 3 June 1913: twelve smokers arrested in Shamian were handed over to the Canton police and sentenced to fines of \$1,000 each. A report from the French vice-consul in Shantou to the French ambassador in Peking on 18 April 1913 suggests that only the poorer smokers were jailed while their affluent counterparts had to pay astronomical fines.

<sup>59</sup> SCMP, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28 February 1913, and 1 March 1913: interview with Hu Hanmin.

<sup>60</sup> Ma Mozhen, *Dupin zai Zhongguo*, 98; Zhou Xingliang, “Minchu Guangdong junzhengfu,” 30. This document mentions three major instances in Canton of the organized destruction of opium (more than 3,000 *jin*) and opium-related equipment between February and April 1913.

The results of these policies can be judged from a series of dispatches on the opium question from the province's governor to the foreign affairs and interior ministries in Peking between February and May 1913.<sup>61</sup> To be sure, these reports must be treated with caution as it can be supposed that they tended to emphasize their author's successes. At the same time, the reports are quite convincingly candid about the difference in results between Canton, which was much easier to control and where it was hoped that opium eradication would be completed within a few months, and the rest of the province, where the fight was expected to be drawn out. The drop in the number of offenses given in these reports as well as favorable testimony by other contemporary reports on the scale of the energy deployed by Chen Jinghua suggest that the severity of official action did indeed lead to a decline in clandestine opium consumption.

Like the rest of the country, Canton saw no hiatus in the fight against the narcotic in the aftermath of the 1911 Revolution.<sup>62</sup> On the contrary, the initial years of the Republic were accompanied by a major step forward in that opium consumption was now strictly prohibited. The emphasis in 1912 and 1913 was clearly on suppression, while action against opium came under the direct control of the administration. There was a movement toward the "nationalization" of this combat that heralded the Guomindang's national policy under its Six-Year Plan in the 1930s.

Whereas the methods had changed, the results were convincing. By the summer of 1913, opium consumption, which had been driven underground over the previous six months, was sharply reduced from imperial times.<sup>63</sup> Total eradication had never seemed so close at hand.

### Long Jiguang and the Old Guangxi Clique, 1913–1920

The political situation in Canton changed radically in the summer of 1913. Yuan Shikai in Peking stopped playing the parliamentary democrat after the Guomindang victory in the March 1913 elections and set himself up as dictator. Guangdong Province joined Sun Yat-sen's national movement of opposition and declared independence on 18 July 1913. Yuan then officially gave Long Jiguang, based with his troops in Guangxi, the task of taking over Guangdong Province. Long entered Canton without much

<sup>61</sup> *Guangdong gongbao*, no. 163, 13 February 1913, no. 185, 11 March 1913, no. 213, 12 April 1913, no. 234, 7 May 1913.

<sup>62</sup> Su Zhiliang, *Zhongguo dupin shi*, 236–237; Zhu Qingbao, *Yapian yu jindai Zhongguo*, 347–349, places the real turning point in 1917.

<sup>63</sup> Peng Jianxin, "Minguo shiqi Guangzhou de duhuo yu jindu" [Prohibition policy and the ravages caused by drugs in Canton under the Republic], *Guangzhou dang'an* [Canton archives] 6 (1998): 30.



difficulty on 11 August 1913, becoming both military and civilian governor of the province and ruling it up to July 1916.<sup>64</sup> Chinese historians are unanimously harsh in their judgment of Long Jiguang, holding him to account for, among many other misdeeds, having restored the opium trade for his own benefit.<sup>65</sup> Long Jiguang, as we shall have occasion to see in ample detail, was not one to shy away from murder and betrayal to gain his ends and was not a very appealing character.<sup>66</sup> The charge that he used opium to finance personal goals is true. However, we need to be precise on the details and distinguish between different phases in Long's opium policy. It was only by gradual stages that he decided to take the political risk of destroying the work of the revolutionaries. This development must also be seen in the light of political changes in Peking, since the other major fact of the Long Jiguang period was that the management of opium in Guangdong gradually ceased to depend on the authority of the central government.

#### 1913 to 1915

Long Jiguang's arrival as governor did not immediately result in a major comeback of opium, even if the months that followed saw a revival of clandestine consumption caused by the disorder prevailing in the province.<sup>67</sup> On the contrary, soon after his arrival, Long Jiguang reiterated the strict prohibition of opium consumption.<sup>68</sup> This prohibition was repeated several times up to 1915.<sup>69</sup> These declarations however can in no way be taken at face value. The fact is that Long owed his position to Yuan Shikai, who at the time had the resources (the military power) to enforce central authority. And all are agreed on Yuan's attachment (at least before 1915) to continuing the policy of opium suppression in order to meet the terms of the 1911 treaty with Britain so that Indian opium imports could cease in 1917.<sup>70</sup> Besides, public opinion in Canton at this time was firmly behind

<sup>64</sup> On the declaration of independence and Long's arrival at the helm in Guangdong, see Fukamachi Hideo, *Jindai Guangdong de zhengdang, shehui, guojia: Zhongguo Guomindang ji qi dangguo tizhi de xingsheng guocheng* [Nation, society, and party in contemporary Guangdong: The Guomindang and the formation of the party-state system] (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2003), 120–124.

<sup>65</sup> Yang Wanxiu, *Guangzhou jianshi*, 369; Su Zhiliang, *Zhongguo dupin shi*, 262; Peng Jianxin, "Minguo shiqi Guangzhou," 30–31.

<sup>66</sup> Fukamachi Hideo, *Jindai Guangdong de zhengdang*, 123–124, 134.

<sup>67</sup> National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), series no. 679 (Maritime Customs), file no. 32385-32399, correspondence from Canton, letters dated 23 December 1913 and 27 August 1913.

<sup>68</sup> *Guangdong gongbao*, no. 370, 16 October 1913; *SCMP*, 4 September 1913; *Guominbao*, 1 September 1913.

<sup>69</sup> *Huaguobao*, 7 January 1915.

<sup>70</sup> Wang Hongbin, *Jindu shijian*, 335.



the prohibition of opium, and, by restoring opium sales, Long would be at risk of increasing his already considerable unpopularity.<sup>71</sup>

Long Jiguang had Chen Jinghua assassinated on 16 September. Chen, perhaps far too sure of his own personal leverage, had been so bold as to remain at his post even after the departure of the revolutionaries.<sup>72</sup> However, his murder must be seen as the elimination not of an obstacle to relaxing the opium prohibition policy but of a man powerful enough to be seen as a threat to Long's personal power.

Various sources indicate that the 1913–1914 period was not marked by spectacular changes in the official attitude to opium. Thus, a report by the Maritime Customs on trading activity in 1914 in the port of Canton, which can hardly be suspected of complacency toward Long's government, states: "it must be said here that there was no relaxation of the measures prohibiting [opium] consumption."<sup>73</sup> The frequency of arrests and of opium confiscation reported in the *Huaguobao*<sup>74</sup> also testifies to the continuance of the anti-opium policy.<sup>75</sup> In November 1914 a decision was made to jail all persons found smoking opium. As a result, at the beginning of 1915, the city's prisons were filled with opium smokers so much so that, to make room, it was decided to flog each offender with one stroke in lieu of each day of his prison sentence.<sup>76</sup> The press also published lists of names and addresses of persons arrested for opium consumption in order to shame and dissuade them.<sup>77</sup>

As late as the first half of 1915, hence almost two years after Long Jiguang's arrival, *Huaguobao* reports suggest that serious efforts were still

<sup>71</sup> Report of the London Missionary Society, 1913, 176; MAE, Nouvelle Série, Sous-série Chine, file no. 592, report by Picot to Poincaré on 21 August 1912.

<sup>72</sup> Report of the London Missionary Society, 1914, 190–194; Rhoads, *China's Republican Revolution: The Case of Kwangtung*, 264.

<sup>73</sup> Maritime Customs, Returns of Trade and Trade Reports for the Year 1914, Canton Trade Report, 992.

<sup>74</sup> The existence of a fairly complete collection of this Cantonese daily in the Zhongshan University library in Canton is a remarkable exception amid huge gaps in the documentation for this period. However, to my knowledge, the *Huaguobao* has never been used by historians writing on the opium question in the Long Jiguang period. On this newspaper and its tendencies, see Liang Qunqiu, *Guangzhou baoye (1827–1990)* [The press in Canton (1827–1990)] (Canton: Zhongshan daxue chubanshe, 1992), 67–68.

<sup>75</sup> See, for example, *Huaguobao*, 6 December 1913, 23 December 1913, 19 October 1914, 21 October 1914.

<sup>76</sup> *Huaguobao*, 3 July 1915, 4 February 1915. According to an article in the *Nanyuebao*, the presiding judge of the Canton appeals court sent out instructions on 23 September 1914 to every court in the province asking that all smokers brought to judgment be sentenced to six months' imprisonment and not be let off with mere fines.

<sup>77</sup> *Huaguobao*, 6 February 1915.

being made to suppress opium consumption under the authority of Zhu Weichao, head of the opium suppression bureau (the *jinyanju*).

Oddly enough, certain sources give figures of the revenues that this very same anti-opium bureau was getting from taxes on the sale of raw opium.<sup>78</sup> This detail, which apparently gives the lie to the maintenance of prohibition on opium consumption, can be explained by assuming that while the prohibition on consumption was still an official reality, and that the opium suppression bureau did not levy any taxes on consumption or prepared opium, it did levy taxes on imported raw opium,<sup>79</sup> which, as in the years 1912–1913, only transitted through Canton and then went into the hinterland.

Still, there are pointers to a certain degree of relaxation during the years 1913–1915 resulting from the activities of Long's troops, euphemistically described in the Canton press as *waishengren* (persons foreign to the province).<sup>80</sup> Long's soldiers organized opium trafficking from Yunnan, the native province of most of them, including their leader.<sup>81</sup> These nevertheless were and remained marginal. This is borne out by the fact that the price of imported foreign opium in Canton peaked in 1914, a development that would have been inconceivable had the competition from contraband Chinese opium been significant.<sup>82</sup>

The Peking government, the Maritime Customs, and the diplomatic corps were alerted to illegal imports of Chinese opium into Canton only in first half of 1915, when these imports apparently started crossing a critical threshold. In the spring of 1915, the Communications Ministry in Peking and the Finance Ministry successively ordered Long Jiguang to stop these imports of raw opium from Yunnan into Guangdong.<sup>83</sup> In the same six months, both the press and official reports began reporting major movements of opium from Yunnan into Guangdong. In January 1915, the *Huaguobao* reported the arrival of major opium convoys from Yunnan, carrying several hundreds of chests. The convoys reached Guangdong through the Indochina railway and the port of Haiphong. Some months

<sup>78</sup> *Yangchengbao*, 14 August 1915.

<sup>79</sup> As in the 1912–1913 period, legal imports of certified opium continued but at an even slower pace (2,410 piculs, or 146 tonnes, in 1913, 1,475 in 1914, 545 in 1915).

<sup>80</sup> *Huaguobao*, 8 April 1915, 17 June 1915; National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), series no. 679 (Maritime Customs), file no. 32385-32399, correspondence from Canton, letter dated 27 August 1913.

<sup>81</sup> Zuimian Shanren (pseudonym), *Guangdong heimu daguan* (Canton, ca. 1920), 6–9.

<sup>82</sup> Maritime Customs, Returns of Trade and Trade Reports for the Year 1914, Canton Trade Report, 992.

<sup>83</sup> *Huaguobao*, 5 May 1915; Aix, GGI 65402, French translation of an article in the *Tientsi pao* dated 23 June 1915.

later, in June, the newspaper reported that major consignments of opium were being carried through Guangxi and the port of Beihai.<sup>84</sup> In May 1914, a report by the British consul in Canton minimized the impact of opium flows from Yunnan into Guangdong, even though a month earlier he had mentioned an agreement between Long and the Yunnan traders to supply opium to Guangdong. This was *yantu*, retailed to traders who prepared it and distributed it in the interior of the province.<sup>85</sup> Other pointers suggest that at the beginning of 1915, despite Zhu Weichao's already mentioned efforts to the contrary, Long Jiguang went ahead and started distributing opium on his own account, especially outside the city of Canton. British reports especially mention a depot of contraband opium in a cement factory in Honam as well as opium houses managed by Long Jiguang's brother Long Yuguang.<sup>86</sup> However, for the time being, unlike for gambling, which Long Jiguang had been farming out since the end of 1914,<sup>87</sup> he did not dare openly set up an opium monopoly.

All in all, Long did indeed continue the opium prohibition policy for about a year and a half, albeit with less enthusiasm and rigor than the previous government. In early 1915 however, Long probably began to take discreet part in this traffic for his own profit. This was only a prelude because, as we shall see, 1915 proved to be a turning point for opium policies in Guangdong.

### *The Turning Point*

The national context in 1915 gave Long two opportunities. First, the gradual resumption of poppy production in the southwestern provinces brought fresh supplies for the clandestine convoys. But above all, in October, Long found an opportune ally in Cai Naihuang, a delegate from the central government, allowing him to openly revive opium trafficking to his own benefit.

On 29 April 1915, Yuan Shikai appointed Cai Naihuang special commissioner in charge of opium prohibition (*jinyan tepairen*) for Guangdong, Jiangsu, and Jiangxi, the only three provinces where it was still possible to import certified opium. While Cai's mission, in theory, was to combat

<sup>84</sup> *Huaguobao*, 8 January 1915, 23 June 1915. The *Shenbao* too had a report on 29 June 1915, about opium convoys from Yunnan protected by soldiers and passing through Guangxi and the port of Beihai.

<sup>85</sup> FO 228/2458, report by the consul in Canton to Jordan on 21 May 1914; FO 228/2461, report by the consul in Canton on 23 April 1915.

<sup>86</sup> FO 228/2461, report by the consul in Canton on 23 April 1915; FO 228/2462, report by the consul in Canton on 19 October 1915.

<sup>87</sup> Aix, GGI 65401, Canton press in 1914, see numerous articles on this subject translated from the Chinese press and published in December 1914; *SCMP*, 11 January 1916.

smuggling in Chinese opium then at its height in these provinces, his real business was to settle the problem of the huge stocks of certified opium remaining in Shanghai and Hong Kong.<sup>88</sup> In May 1915, Cai negotiated an initial agreement with the Shanghai opium merchants that would bring greater revenues to the central government by permitting them, against a levy of \$3,500 per chest, to sell off almost all their stocks of certified opium in all three provinces. This freedom was matched with a lifting of the prohibition on smoking.<sup>89</sup> The Chinese government also undertook not to ban sales in these three provinces for ten years (starting from 1917), even though it had been entitled to do so before this date.<sup>90</sup>

As for the stocks of certified opium in Hong Kong, Cai Naihuang made another agreement in October 1915 with a consortium of ten opium traders in the British colony, including Sassoon and Nemazee.<sup>91</sup> Under this agreement, the certified opium in stock in Hong Kong and a part of the Shanghai stocks were sold to a semiofficial syndicate in Canton, the Medicinal Paste Inspection Bureau (*Yaogao jiancha zongsuo*), which could then process and sell the narcotic in the province. The stocks in question amounted to 1,200 chests: 806 from Hong Kong and 394 from Shanghai. Deliveries began in October 1915 and were to continue until April 1917. It was also agreed that, in addition to prices paid to merchants and customs duties, the syndicate would pay a surtax of \$3,500 per chest to the central government and pay Long Jiguang a sum of \$600.

This move amounted to nothing less than setting up an opium monopoly. A number of guarantees were nonetheless presented in an attempt to save appearances. Some of them became classic in the panoply of devices employed under the Republic in Canton to camouflage the activities of successive opium administrations. Thus, the Medicinal Paste Inspection Bureau was initially supposed to last only 16 months, the time limit set for the gradual clearance of the 1,200 chests covered by the October 1915 agreement. This syndicate itself made *yaogao*, a kind of prepared opium or "medicinal paste," so called on the grounds that ever increasing quantities of a purportedly antiaddictive substance were being added to it. *Yaogao*

<sup>88</sup> Su Zhiliang, *Zhongguo dupin shi*, 240–241.

<sup>89</sup> FO 350, Jordan papers, letter from Jordan to Langley on 13 May 1915; FO 371/2650, report by the Hong Kong Government to the CO dated 13 November 1915. For a fairly good description of the May 1915 agreement and its context, see Wang Hongbin, *Jindu shijian*, 360–363.

<sup>90</sup> Miners, *Hong Kong under Imperial Rule*, 234–235.

<sup>91</sup> The text of this agreement is appended to the Hong Kong Government's report to the Colonial Office dated 30 November 1915: FO 371/2650. The Sassoons, a family of Baghdad Jews originally from Turkey, were a major dynasty of opium traders settled in Bombay since 1832: c.f. Trocki, *Opium, Empire*, 112.

proved to be the first of a long line of euphemisms. Sales to consumers, which began on 1 November, were limited to authorized quantities. Permits were sold exclusively to inveterate smokers, the old and the sick, in theory the only groups allowed to consume daily specified but constantly decreasing quantities of the narcotic. The opium, to guarantee its source, was sold in packages bearing the syndicate's seal. Opium houses continued to be banned.<sup>92</sup> These measures sought to convey the impression that the system in place was temporary and corresponded to the need to wean away addicts.

The syndicate was a joint company of officials and traders. Its capital in November 1915 amounted to \$2 million, of which \$400,000 came from Long Jiguang, \$400,000 from other officials, \$400,000 from the provincial government, and \$800,000 from traders. The bureau was staffed by only one director and a few inspectors, since the essential part of the actual work was entrusted to the traders. The management of retail sales varied according to location: in Canton and Foshan, the province's two main cities, the company itself distributed *yaogao* to 80 retailers who had to sell a minimum quantity every month on pain of a fine, and put down a deposit of \$500 or \$1,000. They were allowed a profit of 2% on sales, and the price of the opium was fixed at \$15 per *liang*. The meager 2% allowed to *yaogao* retailers as well as the very high price of the narcotic aroused scepticism among prospective retailers. In fact, blending of all kinds became indispensable to making profits in the retail trade, and it became clear that the directors of the syndicate were perfectly aware of it. This explains why minimum sales quotas were set. The logic behind this procedure is reminiscent of the *gabelle* in medieval and postmedieval France, when the state found that it could not eliminate fraud and sought at least to limit its effects by obliging the population to purchase a minimum quantity of salt from the royal stockpiles.<sup>93</sup> In 1915, the syndicate hoped in this way to set a minimum level for sales in Canton. This practice was to become a model at different levels in subsequent systems of opium sales during the Republican period. Barring Canton and Foshan, the province was divided into 62 districts: 12 first-class districts and 50 second-class districts. In each district, the monopoly was farmed out to the trader who committed himself

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<sup>92</sup> Maritime Customs, Returns of Trade and Trade Reports for the Year 1915, Canton Trade Report, 1050; FO 228/2462, report by the consul in Canton to the embassy on 19 October 1915; FO 415, CO report on 19 January 1916 on an opium syndicate in Canton; FO 371/2650, Hong Kong Government report to the CO on 30 November 1915; *Nanyuebao*, 4 November 1915, *Huaguobao*, 27 October 1915; *Yangchengbao*, 12 October 1915, 17 April 1916; *Tianjin dagongbao*, 9 October 1915.

<sup>93</sup> Lucien Bély, *Dictionnaire de l'ancien régime* (Paris: PUF, 1996), 581–583.

to selling the greatest possible quantity there. He could set up as many sales points as he wished.

A trader who took charge of a first-class district had to pay \$500 (the amount was \$300 in the case of a second-class district). Competition from contraband opium, which was much cheaper to buy, could greatly dissuade traders and retailers from cooperating with the syndicate. Long therefore made strenuous efforts to combat smuggling. He was clearly determined to stop opium trafficking even for personal gain, and he demonstrated his resolve by closing down a contraband opium depot in Honam that was being managed by his brother.<sup>94</sup>

At another level, Long cleared the decks at the top of the opium suppression bureau to give himself an open field for his new opium policy. Although there is very little information on this opium suppression bureau that had been created in May 1914, the replacement in early June 1915 of Zhu Weichao, who had been in office since the end of 1914, by a certain Long Yaoshu coincided suspiciously with Cai Naihuang's recent arrival on the scene. It is very tempting to see this change as reflecting Long's desire to appoint someone more docile and compliant with the new thrust of his opium policy. Almost nothing is known of Long Yaoshu except that he combined his new position with that of president of the Canton military court. Given the rarity of the Long patronym, it would not be hard to imagine that he too was a member of the general's family.<sup>95</sup>

A question might be asked then as to why Long Jiguang made an agreement on sales of certified opium from Hong Kong—so costly that it jeopardized the syndicate's own future profits. The guarantees given to Long by the British traders that he would personally receive \$600 per chest sold probably weighed in the balance. The pressure still coming from Yuan Shikai (who did not die until 6 June 1916) when the agreement was signed in October 1915 also played a part. For the fact is that this agreement also benefited the central government, which was to receive considerable sums for each chest sold to the syndicate. However, it seems reasonable to assume that Long's primary motivation lay in the opportunity inherent in any agreement signed by Cai Naihuang, a representative of the central government, as that would legitimize the establishment of a supposedly provisional structure. Long's own thinking probably went along the lines that once all or part of the opium from Hong Kong had been sold, it would

<sup>94</sup> FO 228/2462, report by the consul in Canton to the embassy on 19 October 1915; FO 371/2650, report by the Hong Kong Government to the CO on 30 November 1915; *Tianjin dagongbao*, 9 October 1915.

<sup>95</sup> Aix, GGI 65402, French translation of an article published on 2 July 1915 in the *Ko Yun Pao*; *Huaguobao*, 3 June 1915. Long Yaoshu was himself replaced by one Li Guozhi some months later (*Yangchengbao*, 12 October 1915).

permanently be replaced by imports from Yunnan that were far more advantageous to him, and possibly by other imports of noncertified Indian opium through the European colonies.

This is exactly what happened. The *yaogao* that the syndicate offered to retailers was heavily blended, from the very outset, with smuggled, noncertified Indian opium or opium of Chinese origin.<sup>96</sup> It is indeed clear that if the syndicate had not made blends with smuggled opium, the cost per *liang* of prepared opium (about \$12.50) as compared with the final sale price of \$15, which included the retailers' 2% margin, would have left very small profit for the syndicate. A British report dated November 1915, hence barely a month after the syndicate's creation, noted that it was already trying to get raw opium at better prices in Yunnan and Hong Kong. In January 1915, the Colonial Office mentioned similar activity, and Macao and Hong Kong were referred to as possible suppliers of noncertified opium.<sup>97</sup> A very informative report in the *South China Morning Post* on 13 February 1916 described the scale of the raw opium flows between Yunnan and Guangdong, supplying the Canton market with Long Jiguang's assent.

It is therefore not surprising that, by the summer of 1916, the Hong Kong merchants who had been signatories to the October 1915 agreement were complaining that the syndicate had stopped purchasing their opium in February 1916 (i.e., less than five months after the agreement had been made) and that there was an overstock of 922 chests in Hong Kong. In February 1917, the British traders reported that the syndicate had purchased only 300 chests out of the stipulated total of 1,200 while the legal trade in opium was to come to an end by March 1917.<sup>98</sup> These grievances sounded the death knell of an era when certified Indian opium could be seen as a source of massive supplies to the Canton market. In the next few years, only noncertified opium imported from Hong Kong, Guangzhouwan, and especially Macao could still compete with opium varieties from Yunnan and Guizhou in supplying the official Canton monopoly and the illegal circuits, and that too only for a while.

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<sup>96</sup> National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), series no. 679 (Maritime Customs), file no. 32385-32399, correspondence from Canton, letter dated 11 February 1916; FO 371/2650, letter from the consul in Canton to the governor of Hong Kong dated 7 December 1915.

<sup>97</sup> FO 415, report of the CO dated 19 January 1916 on an opium syndicate in Canton; FO 228/2462, report by the Hong Kong Government to the CO on 30 November 1915.

<sup>98</sup> FO 371/2650, letter dated 1 August 1916 from Hong Kong merchants, signatory to the October 1915 agreement, to the governor of Hong Kong; FO 228/2465, letter from Sassoon and Company to the governor of Hong Kong on 5 February 1917. Ultimately, these remaining stocks were to be bought up by the central government according to an arrangement made on 28 January 1917.



The syndicate's lack of interest in the opium stocked in Hong Kong also illustrates the new incapacity of the central authorities in Peking to have any say in opium-related matters in Guangdong. In this context, Cai Naihuang's physical elimination on April 24 was highly significant. The fact that Long dared have Cai assassinated is a clear illustration of the fact that the central authorities no longer wielded any great influence in Canton affairs. Already on 6 April 1916, seeing that the wind was turning, Long had blatantly shown his cynical nature by joining the anti-Yuan Shikai movement and declaring Guangdong's independence. He nevertheless continued to be highly unpopular, not only because of his opium policy but also for his savage repression of revolutionary activity, not to mention his earlier backing of Yuan Shikai's acceptance in May 1915 of Japan's Twenty-One Demands, seen as a moment of national humiliation.<sup>99</sup> These were all so many grievances against Long that no belated change of policy could erase. Cai Naihuang's assassination (or rather his dispatch as a sacrificial victim, since he had apparently become a personal friend of Long's)<sup>100</sup> was an attempt to divert public resentment from Long following the re-establishment of open sales of opium.<sup>101</sup> Long clearly hoped to pin the blame for this restoration on the central government, which he had just disavowed.

The historian Su Zhiliang rightly emphasizes the fact that Long Jiguang was the precursor of a major trend toward the appropriation of opium revenues by local strongmen who began to emerge in the provinces from the middle of the 1910s onward.<sup>102</sup> His new opium policy was a turning point. Initiated in collaboration with Peking and proclaimed as a compromise designed solely to get rid of a limited quantity of certified British opium, it very quickly turned into a policy for establishing an independent and indefinitely extended system of opium distribution in which not a copper went to Peking and the opium sold was essentially Chinese.

<sup>99</sup> The Twenty-One Demands made by Japan to China in January 1915 were designed to seal the former's attempts to bring Shandong Province into its sphere of influence and obtain a range of political and economic privileges. When made public, the demands prompted an outcry in China. Yuan Shikai was nevertheless forced to accept a slightly amended version of the demands in May 1915.

<sup>100</sup> *Huaxing sanribao*, 3 September 1927.

<sup>101</sup> National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), series no. 679 (Maritime Customs), file no. 32409, Canton Current Events and Rumors, report dated 25 April 1916; file 32385-32399, correspondence from Canton, letter dated 25 April 1916; Maritime Customs, decennial report 1912-1921. After the assassination, Long went so far as to make a public statement accusing Cai of having forced him to back Yuan Shikai's attempts to restore the empire and become emperor.

<sup>102</sup> Su Zhiliang, *Zhongguo dupin shi*, 262. His brief reference to Long Jiguang contains two wrong dates.



The system, in its organization as well as its justification, clearly heralded the subsequent modes of organization of opium that were to flourish in Canton in the 1920s and the 1930s. Some of these features, which were to re-emerge in the following decades, must be kept in mind: the recourse in Canton to a system for restricting the scale of adulteration and blending by forcing licensed retailers to make minimum sales under pain of sanctions and the setting up of an area-based revenue farming system (outside Canton). As for the justification of this policy, the emphasis on its temporary nature, the designation of opium as a remedy against drug dependency, and the system of permits supposedly reserved for the sick and the elderly were to become quite commonplace.

*The Dark Night of the Guangxi Clique*

Disavowed by the new government in Peking, Long was forced to abandon not only his plans but also the city of Canton itself in July 1916, when he was appointed to a position on Hainan Island. His compliance with orders and relinquishment of Canton may seem surprising, but in the end it was very probably the threat from the powerful armies under Lu Rongting, appointed to succeed him as governor of Guangdong in September 1916, that convinced him to go. Thereafter, and up to October 1920, Guangdong was administered by the warlords of the Old Guangxi Clique.<sup>103</sup>

This group has an unsavory reputation. Witnesses and historians agree that the period of opium prohibition was now well and truly over in Canton and that the military took advantage of convoys coming from Guangxi to clandestinely transport opium.<sup>104</sup> However, the four years of domination by the Guangxi Clique in Canton, in many ways a troubled and complex period that is only now beginning to find a degree of rehabilitation,<sup>105</sup> were a particularly murky time. Where opium is concerned, some nuance needs to be added to the tale.

Aspects of continuity with the Long period seem to have been in the ascendant up to mid-1917: in October 1916, smokers had to renew their permits with the Medicinal Paste Inspection Bureau. The question of clearing certified opium stocks in Hong Kong was settled with a new agreement signed on 28 January 1917 by Wang Zhirui, the new special commissioner

<sup>103</sup> "Old" as opposed to the famous "New Guangxi Clique" of Huang Shaohong, Li Zongren, and Bai Chongxi that emerged in the 1920s.

<sup>104</sup> FO 228/3360, report by the consul in Canton on 17 January 1920; *Bulletin of the International Anti-Opium Association*, July 1920; Yu Ende, *Zhongguo jinyan faling*, 179; Yang Wanxiu, *Guangzhou jianshi*, 394; Su Zhiliang, *Jinyan quanshu*, 246.

<sup>105</sup> Recent studies suggest that this period, contrary to the somber picture painted by Chinese historiography, saw a number of advances especially with the creation of the Municipal Bureau (Guangzhoushi shizheng gongsuo): Yeung, "Guangzhou, 1800–1925," 198–258.

for opium prohibition in Guangdong, Jiangsu, and Jiangxi provinces. Wang made an agreement with a trader, Lu Pengshan, in which the latter, heading a new syndicate, the Hongan gongsi, took over the opium farm in the province and liquidated the last remaining stocks of certified opium.<sup>106</sup> The terms of the settlement, as summarized in a report by the Maritime Customs, make it seem that there was a return to the period of the Medicinal Paste Inspection Bureau:<sup>107</sup> the only innovation was the expected reappearance of the opium houses in Canton. These were to receive licenses and be taxed according to the number of their lamps. This measure provoked anger in the provincial assembly some weeks later, and was probably never applied. In any case, the sources make no mention of the existence of opium houses in subsequent years. The period of the lease granted to the Hongan gongsi is not specified in the Maritime Customs report, but the authorities mention May 1917 as the deadline for the return to opium prohibition and the dissolution of the syndicate. In June, it was planned to burn the last remaining 1,000 *liang* of opium belonging to the Hongan gongsi. However, in July 1917, the authorities decided to allow the syndicate to extend its activity for two more months and then four months.<sup>108</sup> There is then a gap of about one year in the sources, until we learn that, in May 1918 and again in July, the authorities were planning to lift the ban on opium and grant a Hong Kong trader the right to liquidate the stocks of the Hongan gongsi, which had already stopped operations for some time.<sup>109</sup>

Does this mean that a total ban on opium had well and truly been declared at the end of the four additional months' grace granted to the Hongan gongsi? The attested existence of a detoxification clinic in Canton in mid-1917, directed by Chen Hunshu, an alumnus of the French medical school in Canton, suggests that it would be wrong to shrug off this assumption. It at least points to the fact that the militarists were paying some attention to the ravages wrought by opium.<sup>110</sup> At the end of 1917, this clinic was being funded from the provincial budget to the tune of

<sup>106</sup> National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), series no. 679 (Maritime Customs), file no. 32410, Canton Current Events and Rumors (1917), reports dated 13 January and 15 February 1917; *Shenbao*, 20 February 1917.

<sup>107</sup> Certain other sources do not distinguish between these two bodies, adding in no little measure to the confusion (*Shenbao*, 30 April 1917).

<sup>108</sup> National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), series no. 679 (Maritime Customs), file no. 32410, Canton Current Events and Rumors (1917), reports dated 9 June 1917, 9 July 1917, 17 July 1917; *Shenbao*, 8 February and 30 April 1917.

<sup>109</sup> *Shenbao*, 20 July 1918; National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), series no. 679 (Maritime Customs), file no. 32411, Canton Current Events and Rumors (1918), report dated 17 May 1918.

<sup>110</sup> Aix, GGI 32790, report by Beauvais, French consul in Canton on 10 August 1917. The existence of this clinic is confirmed in a report in National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), series

more than 1,000 yuan per month,<sup>111</sup> even if its trace is soon lost in the rare sources available.

Thereafter, despite the proposal to set up a new syndicate mentioned earlier, there is no reference in the sources to any such initiative. Magazines published by British and American missionaries are instructive: they contain several reports on the establishment of a gambling tax farm in Canton and lament the proliferation of gambling houses but make no mention of any opium farm nor of any notable resumption of opium consumption.<sup>112</sup> More generally, it would be impossible for any opium farm set up between 1918 and 1920 to be completely absent from the sources, many of which mention the gambling farm.<sup>113</sup> It can therefore be assumed that the military leaders of the Guangxi Clique opted for a *modus vivendi* in which they firstly refrained from restoring the opium monopoly with the Hongan gongsi and secondly set about discreetly organizing smuggling from the producing provinces toward Guangdong, while turning a blind eye to opium consumption in order to make sure that outlets continued to exist.

The leaders of the Guangxi Clique also combated poppy cultivation in Guangdong—a practice they found quite undesirable because of the risk of its escaping from their control and enriching and reinforcing small local leaders. An inspection made between 19 March and 15 April 1917 by Wyatt Smith, British consul in Shantou, in the main poppy-cultivating regions of Guangdong, confirmed that this cultivation had well and truly come to an end.<sup>114</sup> Similarly, the Guangxi Clique leaders took special care to suppress any smuggling that was not of their own doing, especially around Guangzhouwan.<sup>115</sup> In 1917, the provincial authorities continued

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no. 679 (Maritime Customs), file no. 32410, Canton Current Events and Rumors (1917), report dated 14 May 1917.

<sup>111</sup> Guangdong caizhengting, *Guangdong shengku liuniandu* (1 July 1917–30 June 1918) *guojia shizhi gekuan shumu baogaoshu* (This report gives detailed figures of budget expenditure for Guangdong Province in 1917), Canton, 1919, 6. No equivalent budget statements are available either for before or after the period covered by this report.

<sup>112</sup> *The Chinese Recorder*, August 1920, p. 589; *The Chronicle of the London Missionary Society*, March 1921, p. 58; *The Foreign Field*, July 1919, p. 148.

<sup>113</sup> The *China Weekly Review* on several occasions toward the end of the 1910s reported militant opposition to gambling tax farming but made no mention whatsoever of any movement against opium: 2 August 1919, 352; 6 December 1919, 26; 26 July 1920, 218.

<sup>114</sup> FO 415, letter from Alston to Balfour on 6 August 1917.

<sup>115</sup> National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), series no. 679 (Maritime Customs), file no. 32411, Canton Current Events and Rumors (1917), report on 25 April 1917; file no. 32411, Canton Current Events and Rumors (1918), report dated 21 June 1918.

to maintain an administration responsible for eliminating contraband, known as the Jinyan duchaju (Opium Suppression Supervisory Bureau).<sup>116</sup>

In general, the situation therefore was very much like the one that had prevailed under Long Jiguang at the beginning of 1915, just before he set up the syndicate for clearing the opium stocks in Hong Kong. The Guangxi Clique drew profit from opium, but its appetite was restrained by a desire to remain discreet. This meant broadly that both traffic and consumption had to be contained within “reasonable” limits.

And the fact is that the abundant literature published by the Canton government under Chen Jiongming and Sun Yat-sen (1920–1922) who succeeded the Old Guangxi Clique, and strove to attribute every ill that beset Guangdong to this clique, paradoxically suggests that opium occupied a minor place during this period. Thus, a 1922 work, *Yisui zhi Guangzhou*, lauding the new municipality under Sun Ke created on 15 February 1921, gave a detailed report on action carried out over the past year and especially stressed that gambling activities, which had seen outrageous proliferation, had been eliminated as soon as Chen Jiongming’s troops entered Canton, at the cost of an annual loss of revenues estimated at 10 million dollars. Curiously, this compilation of the progress over the situation that had prevailed under the Old Guangxi Clique does not have a word to say on opium. This seems to suggest that the situation was not too bad in Canton. Otherwise, the author would certainly have not missed an opportunity to celebrate a return by the new government to the strict application of its proclaimed policy of banning opium smoking.<sup>117</sup> Another document from the same year mentions the severity with which the new authorities were suppressing opium consumption but also stresses the sacrifice entailed by the renouncing of considerable revenues from gambling.<sup>118</sup> A very detailed account published in 1921 of all the misdeeds of the Old Guangxi Clique also attributed only a minor role to opium.<sup>119</sup>

<sup>116</sup> *Huaguobao*, 23 January 1915, 29 June 1915; Guangdong caizhengting, *Guangdong shengku liuniandu*, 6. It is not easy to follow the traces of this administration during these years, and it is difficult to ascertain whether it existed uninterruptedly between 1915 and 1917 or even its fate before 1915 and after 1917.

<sup>117</sup> Huang Yanpei, *Yisui zhi Guangzhou* [Canton Municipality one year on] (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan chubanshe, 1922), 59. Another work of a very similar tone likewise focuses on gambling and pays little attention to opium: Li Zonghuang, *Xin Guangdong guanchaji* [An observer’s notes on the new Guangdong] (Shanghai, 1922), 202–205. This fits fairly well with my hypothesis that the Guangxi militarists applied a more relaxed opium elimination policy. That said, their trafficking activities were limited in scope, practiced with relative discretion and conducted outside any official framework.

<sup>118</sup> Gao Yuhan, *Guangzhou jiyou* [Memories of a trip to Canton] (Shanghai: Yadong tushuguan, 1922), 138.

<sup>119</sup> Li Peisheng, *Guixi juyue zhi youlai ji qi jingguo* [Origins and development of the occupa-

Again, the young Chen Gongbo, who had just returned to Canton with a degree from the philosophy department of Peking University, wrote to Hu Shi in August 1920 describing the atmosphere in Canton, imbued with gambling, prostitution, and pecuniary greed and quite incompatible with the new ideas of the time. The letter does not mention opium, nevertheless the third element of the classic trinity of vices: gambling/prostitution/opium.<sup>120</sup>

Our appreciation of the period of domination by the Guangxi warlords therefore needs to be more nuanced than is customary.<sup>121</sup> Chinese historians probably have an excessive tendency to blacken the picture of pre-Sun Yat-sen Canton, attempting to explain away (or excuse) the manifold difficulties that plagued his government and better exalt its reforming actions by comparing them with the supposed incompetence of the Guangxi leaders.

It is nevertheless true that Chen Jiongming's entry into Canton on 1 November 1920 marked a radical change. With Chen Jiongming, the prospects of a total ban on opium returned once again and for the last time to the agenda.

### **The 1921–1923 Interregnum: Banning Opium as Political Suicide for Chen Jiongming?**

Chen Jiongming was a major personality in the history of Guangdong at the end of the empire and the beginning of the Republic.<sup>122</sup> He stands out as one of the main leaders of the revolutionary movement in Guangdong at the end of the Qing dynasty. It was logical therefore for him to play an important role in the government set up at Canton between November 1911 and August 1913. He was the civilian governor of the province from 4 July to 4 August 1913, at which point he was evicted by the arrival of Long Jiguang and went into exile in Malaysia. In December 1915, Chen Jiongming secretly returned to his native eastern Guangdong to raise an

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tion of Guangdong by the Guangxi Clique] (Canton, 1921).

<sup>120</sup> Hu Shi, *Hu Shi lai wang shuxin xuan* [Hu Shi's selected correspondence] (Hong Kong: Xianggang Zhonghua shuju, 1983), vol. 1, p. 108.

<sup>121</sup> For a summary account of the Guangxi Clique's period of predominance, see Jiang Zuyuan, *Jianming Guangdong shi*, 668–669, as well as Peng Jianxin, "Minguo shiqi Guangzhou," 31.

<sup>122</sup> Leslie Dingyan Chen, *Chen Jiongming and the Federalist Movement: Regional Leadership and Nation Building in Early Republican China* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1999). In this respect, an earlier biography paints a portrait of Chen Jiongming that reflects the traditional view presented by Communist historiography: Duan Yunzhang and Ni Junming, *Chen Jiongming de yi sheng* [The life of Chen Jiongming] (Zhengzhou: Henan Renmin chubanshe, 1989).

army against Long Jiguang. During the time of Sun Yat-sen's first government in Canton, Chen was sent to establish control over the southern part of Fujian Province, which he occupied from August 1918 onward. He remained based in this area with his troops up to August 1920, when he marched upon Canton, conquering the city by the beginning of November 1920.<sup>123</sup> Even though Chen had to come to terms with Sun Yat-sen and other Guomindang leaders, the fact that the bulk of the military forces were under his orders meant that he continued to be the real master of the situation in Guangdong up to 1923. In the matter of opium, he was therefore able to impose a policy at one with his own convictions.

By then, the fight against gambling and opium was already a major feature on Chen's personal road map. In the middle of the first decade of the twentieth century, when he was not yet thirty, Chen, along with friends in Haifeng in the east of the province, had created a society for the elimination of opium. In the Guangdong Province assembly, to which he was elected at the end of the Qing dynasty, he had worked energetically to eliminate gambling, which then was a source of major tax revenues. His arrival in Canton in November 1920 therefore revived hopes that the lost cause of opium prohibition would rise phoenixlike from its ashes.

One of the first orders sent out by Chen could only encourage these hopes. He announced a ban on gambling for which the Guangxi warlords had organized a farming system.<sup>124</sup> This resolute and courageous act bore particularly heavy consequences for the province's finances, all the more so as Guangdong, then under the Guomindang, was at war with the Old Guangxi Clique, which had fallen back to its eponymous province. The hostilities happened to continue for a lengthy period, and were costly in blood and treasure. Chen was to remain faithful to his convictions up to 1923. Even at the end of 1922, when he was in dire financial straits and threatened by Sun Yat-sen's troops, which were already trying to dislodge him from Canton, Chen Jiongming could not bring himself to restore the gambling tax farm.<sup>125</sup>

Apart from eliminating gambling, an action as important as it was symbolic, Chen's actions at the head of the province were clearly progressive, marked by the creation of the Canton municipality and special attention paid to educational reform, which he entrusted to Chen Duxiu (appointed

<sup>123</sup> Chan Ming Kou, "A Turning Point," 228.

<sup>124</sup> *Minguo ribao*, 30 November 1920, 1 December 1920; MAE, Série Asie 1918-29, Sous-série Chine, file no. 25, consul's weekly reports on the general situation in Canton, report dated 16 November 1921; Li Conghuang, *Xin Guangdong guanchaji*, 202-203.

<sup>125</sup> MAE, Série Asie 1918-29, Sous-série Chine, file no. 213, French consul's report to the MAE dated 7 December 1922.

education minister on 15 December 1920).<sup>126</sup> Similarly, Guangdong Province financed studies abroad, especially in France, for large numbers of students.<sup>127</sup>

As for opium, Chen proclaimed a strict ban on its cultivation, transportation, and consumption in January 1921.<sup>128</sup> Instructions to act with severity were regularly sent to the police, who according to various sources acted with diligence.<sup>129</sup> An article in the *Minguo ribao* dated 14 February 1922 reported that no fewer than thirty-six vessels (including six steamboats), each carrying half a dozen policemen, were monitoring the environs of Canton city, especially making checks on every boat coming from Hong Kong and Macao.

The punishment inflicted on both vendors and consumers of opium could be as much as 1,000 yuan in fines and 1,000 days in prison and was far severer for repeat offenders. This led to a drop in the number of smokers, and the Canton police turned their attentions more particularly to the opium vendors.<sup>130</sup>

Chen Jiongming was indisputably energetic in the matter of repression.<sup>131</sup> It is true that underground consumers did get together to open opium houses in the suburbs where it was easier to avoid police surveillance, while Chen's own ill-paid troops were often tempted to protect the opium traffic for their own ends.<sup>132</sup> However, Chen's severity was unrelenting, as can be seen from the relatively large number of monthly arrests

<sup>126</sup> On Chen Duxiu's activities in Guangdong from December 1920 to July 1921, see Ren Jianshu, *Chen Duxiu dazhuan* [Biography of Chen Duxiu] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1999), 249–259.

<sup>127</sup> Abel Bonnard, *En Chine* (Paris: Fayard, 1924), 292; Chan Ming Kou, "A Turning Point," 234. For a general account of Chen's actions from 1920 to 1922, see Chen, *Chen Jiongming and the Federalist Movement*, 123–153.

<sup>128</sup> *Guangdong qunbao*, 11 January 1921; MAE, Série Asie 1918–29, Sous-série Chine, file no. 25, consul's weekly reports on the general situation in Canton, report dated 4 January 1921.

<sup>129</sup> Canton Municipal Archives, series no. 570, *Guangzhou shi shizheng gongbao*, 20 December 1921, 26 January 1922; *Guangdong qunbao*, 6 January 1921; National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), series no. 679 (Maritime Customs), file no. 32413, Canton Current Events and Rumors (1921), reports dated 17 September and 11 December 1921.

<sup>130</sup> *Minguo ribao*, 14 February 1922.

<sup>131</sup> Western sources pay tribute to Chen here: c.f. second quarter of 1921, summary of confidential reports sent by the consuls, in Robert L. Jarman, ed., *China, Political Reports, 1911–1960* (Cambridge Archives Editions, 2001), vol. 1, p. 494; National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), series no. 679 (Maritime Customs), file no. 32385–32399, correspondence from Canton, letter dated 8 December 1921.

<sup>132</sup> *Guangdong qunbao*, 21 April 1921, 18 May 1921; National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), series no. 679 (Maritime Customs), file no. 32413, Canton Current Events and Rumors (1921), report dated 27 December 1921; confidential report by the British consul in Canton to the embassy for the last quarter of 1922 in Jarman, *China, Political Reports, 1911–1960*, 2:366; *Minguo ribao*, 1 April 1921.





Figure 1. Number of Arrests in Canton for Opium-Related Offenses (March 1921–December 1923)

Sources: Guangzhoushi shizhengting zongwu ke bianjigu, *Guangzhoushi shizheng gaiyao* [Principles of the Canton municipal government] (Canton: Guangzhoushi shizhengting zongwu ke bianjigu, 1922), n.p., and *Guangzhoushi jingchaju gong'an shixiang baogao* [Guangdong Police Bureau, report on security questions] (Canton, 1923).

in Canton for opium-related offenses, especially between March 1921 and August 1922.<sup>133</sup> The case of a member of the provincial assembly, Yang Mengchuan, sentenced for opium addiction, also testifies to the determination of the authorities to suppress opium consumption at every level.<sup>134</sup>

One interesting innovation came with Chen Jiongming's revival of the idea of partnership with the anti-opium associations when he publicly backed the creation of the Guangdong branch of the International Anti-Opium Association (Guangdong Wanguo jinyan fenhui).<sup>135</sup> On 26 Novem-

<sup>133</sup> See figure 1. A comparison of the number of arrests for opium-related offenses between March 1921 and October 1921 (975) with those for offenses such as theft (220) and homicide (111) clearly shows the scale of the efforts made to track down opium consumers and traffickers.

<sup>134</sup> *Sifa gongbao*, no. 2, January 1922, pp. 35–41.

<sup>135</sup> Maritime Customs, Canton decennial report 1912–1921, p. 189; National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), series no. 679 (Maritime Customs), file no. 32385–32399, correspondence from Canton, letter dated 8 December 1921.



ber 1921, he attended its solemn inaugural ceremony and made a speech before 250 people, including major personalities in the provincial government. Among them were the chief justice of the Supreme Court, Xu Qian, the president of the province's Education Union, Wang Jingwei, the mayor of Canton, Sun Ke, and also Wu Tingfang, all of whom took the floor. This meeting elected the association bureau, which included not only these Chinese personalities but also Canton's French bishop, the Portuguese consul, and the commissioner of the Canton Maritime Customs.<sup>136</sup> Xu Qian chaired the meeting.<sup>137</sup> The absence from the bureau of any nonofficial Chinese personalities would appear to be a remarkable fact. The aims of the association, as adopted at this inaugural meeting, were to assist the provincial government in its struggle against the cultivation, transportation, and sale of opium. The creation of an anti-opium clinic was also mentioned. Local branches were to be opened throughout the province.

The association lost no time in putting its intentions into practice and set up a detoxification center on Honam Island (in the locality of Nanshitou). The center was allocated a monthly subsidy of 1,000 yuan by the municipality that had been trying since August 1921 to find premises for a similar establishment of its own.<sup>138</sup> Smokers who had been arrested as well those who came forward voluntarily were sent to the center for withdrawal treatment. Treatment could also be obtained in ordinary hospitals on application to the hygiene committee of the city of Canton.<sup>139</sup> In January 1922, the director of the clinic, Deng Xianggen, made a request for funding (which seems to have been turned down by the municipal sanitation department) to train doctors and staff throughout the province in the treatment of opium smokers.<sup>140</sup> In early 1922, the municipality itself opened

<sup>136</sup> FO 228/3364, report by the British consul in Canton on the inaugural meeting of the Canton section of the International Anti-Opium Association on 21 November; *Shenbao*, 21 December 1921, 8 December 1921.

<sup>137</sup> Xu Qian, a Christian close to Sun Yat-sen, clearly appears as its driving force. As early as October 1921 he wrote a letter to the municipality calling for the creation of a provincial committee for the elimination of opium: Canton Municipal Archives, series no. 570, *Guangzhoushi shizheng gongbao*, 21 October 1921. He was still playing a central role at the end of March 1922 when a large-scale movement was planned for the following month (*Minguo ribao*, 29 March 1922). The *Bulletin of the International Anti-Opium Association* (May 1923) also reported that the Canton branch had been stagnating ever since (and because of) the departure of its initiator. Quan was to become the first president of the National Anti-Opium Association (Zhonghua guomin juduhui) founded in August 1924 (Zhou, *Anti-Drug Crusades*, 44–46).

<sup>138</sup> Canton Municipal Archives, series no. 570, *Guangzhoushi shizheng gongbao*, 23 August 1921, 26 September 1922, 19 February 1922; *Guangzhoushi shizhengting zongwu ke bianjigu*, *Guangzhoushi shizheng gaiyao*, municipality section, 26.

<sup>139</sup> *Minguo ribao*, 5 April 1922: articles 3, 4 and 5 of the new regulations for the elimination of opium (March 1922).

<sup>140</sup> Canton Municipal Archives, series no. 570, *Guangzhoushi shizheng gongbao*, 24 January

a forty-bed annex dedicated to detoxification at the municipal hospital where all that the patients had to pay for was their board.<sup>141</sup>

However, the plan to open local branches in every *xian*<sup>142</sup> of the province remained a dead letter: at the end of March 1922, the Guangdong branch of the International Anti-Opium Association decided to relaunch the movement. It sent letters to administrators and to various leading personalities of the province's *xian* encouraging them to jointly create branches of the association.<sup>143</sup> Nothing in the sources suggests that the appeal was heard. The probable failure of the attempt to extend the geographical range of real action by the association clearly indicates the limits of Chen Jiongming's action, which seems to have been truly effective only in Canton and far less so in the rest of the province.<sup>144</sup> We have already seen an illustration of these limits with the opening of opium houses on the periphery of the provincial capital. But it must also be noted that all the operations mentioned in the press were concentrated in Canton, and certain draconian regulations were valid only in this city. Article 7 of the new regulations of March 1922 for the suppression of opium is very eloquent in this respect: the punishment for smokers already treated in a clinic who had resumed their habit was banishment for life from the provincial capital.<sup>145</sup> It would seem that Chen Jiongming had little choice but to concentrate his action on Canton with the hope of turning it into an example for the rest of the province, perhaps even for all of China. His power and his resources were clearly not sufficient for him to impose the same system throughout the province.

It was probably to make up for this insufficiency that Chen Jiongming tried to return to using progressive elites organized in associations. It must be stressed all the same that leading personalities from the government seem to have played a far greater role in the management of this association than had been the case under the empire with the Guangdong jieyan zonghui (Guangdong Anti-Opium Association). The authorities did not limit their activity to attending the founding meeting of the association and then taking up honorific positions on the association committee. On

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1922, 6 February 1922, 13 February 1922.

<sup>141</sup> Canton Municipal Archives, series no. 570, *Guangzhoushi shizheng gongbao*, 1 February 1922.

<sup>142</sup> The *xian*, generally translated as "district," was the basic administrative unit under the empire and the Republic. Guangdong Province had ninety-four *xian* under the Republic: Hamada Junichi, *Gendai dai Shina* [Today's China] (Tokyo: Gendai daishina kankōkai, 1931), 1445.

<sup>143</sup> *Minguo ribao*, 29 March 1922.

<sup>144</sup> FO 228/3276, Canton intelligence report, March quarter 1921; Canton intelligence report, September quarter 1921.

<sup>145</sup> *Minguo ribao*, 5 April 1922.

the contrary, months after the association had been created, Xu Quan, Chen Jiongming, and Wang Jingwei were still its driving force.<sup>146</sup> This direct takeover of the association must be seen in the light of a more general phenomenon at the beginning of the 1920s in which charitable associations were placed under tutelage. Even though there was no question of eliminating these associations, this period saw them come under the coordination and control of an official institution: the education bureau of the recently created municipality.<sup>147</sup>

This key role played by government officials in the Guangdong branch of the International Anti-Opium Association illustrates both the determination of the authorities and the difficulty of mobilizing elites outside the ambit of the administration. The festivities organized on 1 January 1922 to celebrate the anti-opium struggle also suggest that the association did not have any momentum other than that given by the authorities. On the afternoon of 1 January, more than seven thousand schoolchildren of all ages were taken out in parade through Canton. In the evening, soldiers marched with lanterns. Some of them, disguised as opium smokers, acted out skits conceived to discourage the population from smoking. They were followed by the trade unions marching in order.<sup>148</sup> The program depicted the mobilization of society as a whole under the leadership of the political authority without any intermediary body between the authorities and the population, and the fact is that no mention was made in the organization of this parade of the Guangdong branch of the International Anti-Opium Association.

As a result, the attempt to mobilize progressive elites in support of official policy became protracted. This might be because the model of very extensive delegation practiced under the empire appeared to be outdated, and Chen actually preferred the authoritarian official approach of which he had been one of the proponents when he was part of the leadership in 1912 and 1913. It could also be that the Cantonese elites were less enthusiastic about participating in the struggle (even with money). We cannot be certain of it, but the Cantonese elites were probably discouraged by the successive changes of government that they had witnessed as well as the proliferation of exactions and taxes that accompanied these changes. The success of Chen's policy seemed to them to be as uncertain as his continuance in power. The need to preserve their own fortunes, and in any case

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<sup>146</sup> *Minguo ribao*, 29 March 1922; SDN/LON, file R755, telegram of the Canton Anti-Opium Association dated 8 March 1922.

<sup>147</sup> Alfred Lin, "Warlord, Social Welfare, and Philanthropy: The Case of Guangdong under Chen Jitang, 1929–1936," *Modern China* 30, no. 2 (April 2004): 162.

<sup>148</sup> *Minguo ribao*, 9 January 1922.

not to disclose their existence by conspicuous generosity, clearly prevailed over more altruistic considerations.

Chen Jiongming's arrival in 1920 marked a radical change from the 1913–1920 period, bringing hopes of a return to a total ban on opium. His prohibitionist efforts were real. But equally real was his military defeat at the beginning of 1923 against a disparate coalition, organized by Sun Yat-sen in order to dislodge him from Canton, some months after the two men had fallen out. Western diplomatic sources, which were generally very favorable to Chen Jiongming, often explain his defeat by his obstinate refusal to tolerate gambling and opium in order to raise taxes on these activities.<sup>149</sup> It is certain that he indirectly contributed to the weakening of his own forces by renouncing these two categories of income.

In any case, subsequent events suggest that this was his own reading of his plight. Taking refuge with his troops in the eastern part of the province from 1923 to 1925, Chen decided to sacrifice his ideals to immediate political necessities. As of January 1923, he started trying to fill his coffers by encouraging the cultivation of poppy and setting up regulations on opium sales.<sup>150</sup>

A document from the archives, which must be treated with caution all the same, even suggests that in November 1922, when he was still at the helm in Canton, he made approaches to the Indochina authorities in order to obtain the transit of an opium convoy and improve his own financial situation.<sup>151</sup> At a time when he was isolated and encircled by Sun Yat-sen's allies, Chen Jiongming quite possibly had already begun to make a U-turn in policy toward a more pragmatic approach.<sup>152</sup>

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In 1907, the imperial authorities obtained a diplomatic agreement with Britain for the gradual elimination of opium imports from India. Internally, they strove with some success from 1906 onward to gradually reduce

<sup>149</sup> Cf. confidential report by the British consul in Canton to the embassy for the third quarter of 1922 in Jarman, *China, Political Reports, 1911–1960*, 2:366.

<sup>150</sup> FO 371/10967, FO report dated 30 April to the League of Nations on the opium situation in the Shantou region. According to this report, there were two hundred opium houses operating in Shantou: *Minguo ribao*, 2 December 1923 and 19 December 1923.

<sup>151</sup> This is a handwritten letter from the French consul in Canton dated 15 November 1922 and addressed simply to "my dear commanding officer." The letter refers to a very informal proposal from Chen Jiongming, made by middlemen: Chen was trying to improve his financial situation through an operation involving an opium convoy (Aix, GGI 42889).

<sup>152</sup> V. Ho similarly concludes that the opium elimination policy was abandoned in the very last months of Chen's presence in Canton, putting forward as evidence the fact that opium revenues had been used as a guarantee to take out a large loan from a Japanese bank: *Understanding Canton*, 130–131 and 143–144.

the production and consumption of opium throughout China. In Canton, the revolutionary government that followed the downfall of the empire continued the same policies after 1912. While the officials of the empire had been more inclined to allow the notables in the Guangdong jieyan zonghui to carry out anti-opium activities, the revolutionaries for their part preferred to take direct control over these activities. Chen Jinghua, the energetic chief of police, personified this dynamic approach that culminated in January 1913 in a total ban on opium consumption. Chen, as it happened, continued to be remembered throughout the Republican period in Canton,<sup>153</sup> even earning the illustrious nickname of the “Second Lin Zexu” (Di’er zhi Lin Zexu).<sup>154</sup> The arrival of the warlord Long Jiguang as governor of the province in August 1913 did not lead to the immediate return of opium. However, in 1915, Long made an agreement with the Peking envoy Cai Naihuang, responsible for clearing the pending stocks of certified opium in Hong Kong and Shanghai, to set up a syndicate, the Yaogao jiancha zongsuo, responsible for selling opium in Guangdong. This syndicate was nothing other than a monopoly that quickly turned away from certified opium to procure its own supplies at far lower cost in Yunnan. Besides, Long’s period in power was such a major watershed that, for the next two decades, the management of opium in Guangdong almost completely ceased to depend on central government initiative and policies.

However, the process that led to the long-term legalization of opium in Guangdong was far from being linear. After Long’s fall in the summer of 1916, the Guangxi warlords did not pursue the monopoly system in any lasting manner. They limited themselves to deriving profit from smuggling on a fairly modest scale. Therefore, the attitude of these warlords, at any rate where opium is concerned, does not correspond to the black legend put out by Chinese historiography. In November 1920, Chen Jiongming, the province’s new master, even returned to a policy of strict prohibition, which recalls the policy followed in 1912 and 1913 by the revolutionary government in which, as it happened, he had played an active role. Chen’s defeat brought an end to a ten-year period when the elimination of opium consumption was still feasible, a period when no political

<sup>153</sup> Reports from the 1920s and 1930s that describe the opium policies carried out in the province since Qing times often skip entire years in their narrative but rarely fail to mention the pugnacious Chen. His personality and action made a lasting impression: XGR, 12 June 1935; *Huaxing sanribao* [The Chinese star], 23 July 1927; Li Zonghua, *Mofan zhi Guangzhoushi* [Canton, a model city] (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1929), 102.

<sup>154</sup> Zhou Xingliang, “Minchu Guangdong junzhengfu,” 30; Ma Mozhen, *Dupin zai Zhongguo*, 97–98.

authority, barring Long Jiguang, had dared cross the Rubicon of opium legalization.

By January 1923, it was quite clear that giving up opium revenues was tantamount to political suicide in the context of a China now dominated by warlords all drawing profit from opium revenues.<sup>155</sup> Be that as it may, the authorities in Canton had to rely on every possible resource to ensure their short-term survival in the face of neighbors eager to grasp this choice prize that was South China's most prosperous city.

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<sup>155</sup> See the chapter on this question in Baumler, *The Chinese and Opium*, 89–110.

### THREE

## An Indispensable Source of Revenue, 1923–1936

A few months after Chen Jiongming's defeat, itself so symptomatic of the times, Canton's opium circuits came under sustained official control. It therefore no longer makes any sense to look at opium management by government in terms of a dilemma between prohibition and legalization. The one common thread running through opium policy from 1923 to 1936 was the search to maximize income by improving the organization and control of the opium circuits. That said, the administration of opium went through two distinct periods. The first, from 1923 to 1931, was one of great instability in terms of both administrative structures and the officials who headed them. No fewer than twelve different heads of staff followed one another, each serving in office for little more than six months on average. By contrast, from 1931 onward and up to 1936, the opium system saw only a few minor adjustments. A period of remarkable stability ensued.

The chronic instability of the first phase stemmed essentially from two causes. First, the 1923–1931 period saw frequent shifts in power relations at high levels. Every faction that came to dominance in Canton strove to place its own men in key positions of the opium administration and ensure total control over this vital resource. Whenever power was being shared among different cliques, control over opium became a key factor in the definition of a mutually acceptable balance of forces. The second cause of instability was the perpetual attempt to maximize revenues through an optimum mix of direct administration of opium sales and outsourcing. Once these two issues were resolved, around 1931, the administration of opium achieved a state of stability under a permanent organization headed by Huo Zhiting.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Huo Zhiting (see the biography section herein), a key figure of the times, was a Cantonese businessman involved in gambling and opium from the Long Jiguang period onward. In the 1920s, he was the driving personality behind several trading companies (Xingyun, Nansheng, Liangyue) that carried opium from Yunnan to Guangdong. Under Chen Jitang, he pushed to become the organizer of the opium circuits for the entire province. There is a

## The Twofold Instability of the Opium Administration

### *Political Struggles for the Control of the Opium Administration*

#### Hostage to the *Kejun*

In 1923, the survival of Sun Yat-sen's government in Canton depended solely on its military power, which, however, was formed almost entirely by mercenary troops foreign to the province (essentially from Yunnan, Guangxi, and Hunan). Known as *kejun*, or "guest troops," these soldiers required regular payment, especially since military operations were still underway in eastern Guangdong against Chen Jiongming, who continued to be a threat.<sup>2</sup> This situation further complicated the financial position of a regime that was already imposing numerous levies and confiscations in preparation for its primary goal: the *Beifa*, or Northern Expedition, aimed at the military reunification of China.<sup>3</sup>

The *kejun*, a poorly paid and undisciplined lot, reintroduced opium wherever they were stationed in Canton and raised taxes on it.<sup>4</sup> The French consul reported at the end of 1923 that soldiers were administering or controlling no fewer than five hundred opium houses in the city.<sup>5</sup> Sun Yat-sen's government did not react, a fact borne out by the monthly figures for opium-related arrests in Canton. Their number, which had almost always been above one hundred between March and October 1921, and had remained at an average of fifty arrests per month in 1922, fell to no more than ten per month between February and December 1923 (see chapter 2, figure 1).

Despite strong personal convictions against opium,<sup>6</sup> Sun Yat-sen decided to set up an opium monopoly for the benefit of his own government.

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biography of Huo Zhiting: Zhu Chunting, *Guangdong duwang* [The gambling king of Guangdong] (Canton: Guangdong jingji chubanshe, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> Yang Wanxiu, *Guangzhou jianshi*, 440–444; A. I. Chereparov, *As Military Adviser in China* (translated from the Russian by Sergei Sosinsky) (Moscow: Progress, 1982), 93.

<sup>3</sup> Marie Claire Bergère, *Sun Yat-sen* (Paris: Fayard, 1994), 358–366; Michael Tsin, *Nation, Governance, and Modernity*, 94–98; Shuk Wah Poon, "Refashioning Popular Religion," 57–69; CWR, 13 October 1923, 235–236.

<sup>4</sup> CWR, 10 March 1923, 62; 24 March 1923, 140–141; 25 August 1923, 436; 13 October 1923, 235–236; National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), series no. 676 (Maritime Customs), file no. 14218, Canton district events and current rumor (January–June 1923), report dated 17 March 1923; Mo Xiong, *Mo Xiong huiyi lu* [Collected recollections of Mo Xiong] (Canton: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1991), 31.

<sup>5</sup> MAE, Série Asie 1918–29, Sous-série affaires communes, file no. 55, report by the consul in Canton in reply to the circular dated 24 January 1924.

<sup>6</sup> Wang Hongbin, "Sun Zhongshan lun Zhongguo jindai dupin wenti," *Minguo dan'an* 2 (1993): 127–130; Su Zhiliang and Zhao Changqing, *Jindu quanshu* [The ledger of opium suppression] (Beijing: Zhongguo minzhu fazhe chubanshe), 229–230.



On 7 December 1923, he appointed Yang Xiyan, former finance minister, to the position of *jinyan duban* (opium suppression superintendent).<sup>7</sup> However, the composition of the Opium Suppression Superintendent's Office (*Jinyan dubanshu*), headed by Yang Xiyan, presaged his own future difficulties. Yang's two assistants were, to all intents and purposes, delegates of Yang Ximin and Liu Zhenhuan, the two main warlords heading the *kejun*, and this was a situation that displeased the chiefs of Guangdong's own troops, who were giving free rein to the opium trade in the areas under their own control.<sup>8</sup> Their two main officers, Li Fulin and Zhang Guozhen, in turn forced Yang Xiyan to take aboard their own representatives.<sup>9</sup> In other words, the number of Yang Xiyan's assistants and their loyalties reflected the balance of forces among the different military leaders occupying Canton and its surrounding areas, a situation that boded ill for Yang's freedom of action.<sup>10</sup>

The Opium Suppression Superintendent's Office on Taikang Road proved to be effectively toothless. It was supposed to take charge of opium transportation and trading but could not put a stop to independent trafficking by the various troops, especially those from Yunnan.<sup>11</sup> The office was not only inefficient: it succeeded within a few weeks in acquiring a huge staff who received fat salaries, although a number of them did not even turn up for work.<sup>12</sup> A proportion at least of these superfluous personnel were troops sent by the different military forces to act as inspection teams.<sup>13</sup> It is likely that the commanders were milking the system, having found a convenient way to get the superintendent to pay the wages of at least some of their soldiers.

<sup>7</sup> Liu Shoulin, Wan Renyuan, Wang Yuwen, and Kong Qingtai, *Minguo zhiguan nianbiao* [Chronological yearbook of civil servants in the Republican period] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1995), 140.

<sup>8</sup> *GMR*, 2 July 1925.

<sup>9</sup> Ye Shaohua, "Guangzhou jinyan quanli," 112.

<sup>10</sup> So powerless and isolated was Yang that he even managed once, while in office, to get briefly held for ransom by cash-starved military leaders: FO 371/10337, intelligence report from Canton Consulate General, 31 March 1924.

<sup>11</sup> *Shina* 22, no. 4 (1931): 49; FO 371/10337, report by the consul in Canton to the FO on 31 May 1924; *GMR*, 9 January and 8 March 1924.

<sup>12</sup> National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), series no. 679 (Maritime Customs), file no. 14220, Canton district occurrences (January–June 1924), report dated 19 February 1924; *Canton Gazette*, 19 February 1924, 28 February 1924, 3 April 1924; MAE, Série Asie 1918–29, Sous-série affaires communes, file no. 55, report by the consul in Canton in reply to the circular dated 24 January 1924.

<sup>13</sup> *GMR*, 20 and 25 February 1924: Depending on their numbers, the *kejun* had to supply the *duban* with a company or platoon of men who would obey his orders and for whose upkeep he was responsible.

By the beginning of March 1924, it had become clear that the receipts taken in by the superintendent's office were barely enough to cover its expenses.<sup>14</sup> Yang Xiyan was dismissed on 17 March for his inability to prevent corruption and various forms of embezzlement.<sup>15</sup> It would not be an overstatement to say that his dismissal was related to his general incapacity to take charge of the superintendent's office.

Deng Zeru, appointed in Yang's place on the very day of his dismissal, resigned a week later.<sup>16</sup> Deng was a leading figure in the Guomindang right wing, and clearly a man of a different stamp from Yang.<sup>17</sup> However, it can be assumed that the discomfiting presence of the *kejun* and the total disorganization of the office made him reluctant to venture into these troubled waters.<sup>18</sup>

In the face of Deng's abdication and the earlier fiasco that had terminated the appointment of Yang Xiyan, a man of the administrative apparatus working with different military representatives, Sun Yat-sen changed tactics. Lu Diping, whom he now appointed as superintendent, was backed by the Hunan troops, numbering fourteen thousand, and was himself one of the main leaders.<sup>19</sup> Sun clearly hoped that Lu would be better capable of defending the interests of the monopoly in areas held by other militarists. Sun's second innovation was to let Lu keep the income from the monopoly for the upkeep of his own troops, who would therefore no longer be paid by the government.<sup>20</sup> This was nothing less than the direct allocation of opium revenues to an item in the government's budget.

Lu Diping made his troops responsible for inspection and for combatting fraud.<sup>21</sup> The results were disappointing because, by August, the press was again reporting a total reorganization of the superintendent's office.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>14</sup> *Canton Gazette*, 3 March 1924.

<sup>15</sup> National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), series no. 679 (Maritime Customs), file no. 14220, Canton district events and current rumor (January–June 1924), report dated 19 March 1924.

<sup>16</sup> Liu Shoulin et al., *Minguo zhiguan nianbiao*, 141.

<sup>17</sup> Yang Wanxiu, *Guangzhou jianshi*, 414 and 422; National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), series no. 679 (Maritime Customs), file no. 14220, Canton district events and current rumor (January–June 1924), report dated 18 March 1924.

<sup>18</sup> FO 371/10337, secret report by the consul in Canton dated 31 March 1924; National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), series no. 679 (Maritime Customs), file no. 14220, Canton district events and current rumor (January–June 1924), report dated 27 April 1924.

<sup>19</sup> Vera Vishnyakova-Akimova, *Two Years in Revolutionary China, 1925–1927* (translated from the Russian by Steven I. Levine) (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 184; Chereparov, *As Military Adviser in China*, 25–26.

<sup>20</sup> CWR, 19 July 1924, 232.

<sup>21</sup> GMR, 8 April 1924.

<sup>22</sup> GMR, 28 July 1924.

It is clear (and Lu Diping made no bones about it) that the other military leaders were continuing with their illegal trafficking activities.<sup>23</sup>

On 2 September 1924, Lu Diping resigned as superintendent, yielding his place to Xie Guoguang, another leader of the Hunan troops. In the months that followed, the press paid scant attention to the superintendent's activities as it was engrossed in another crisis, the uprising of the Merchant Corps, which Sun Yat-sen quelled by 15 October 1924.<sup>24</sup> Still, it can be supposed that no significant event took place on the opium scene before June 1925.

#### June 1925: A Fresh Start?

The month saw a radical change in the situation: an attempted coup by Yang Ximin and Liu Zhenhuan and their troops on 6 June was crushed within a week. To be sure, the Guomindang continued thereafter to rely on troops from outside the province. However, the downfall of Liu and Yang meant that the most unruly and rapacious of the commanders had been expelled. The other troops were not only less independent but gradually lost influence as the Guomindang, with the help of Russian military advisers, developed its own military structure with officers trained at the Huangpu (Whampoa) Academy that had opened in the spring of 1924.<sup>25</sup>

In the enthusiasm that accompanied the victory over Yang and Liu, a total suppression of gambling and opium was proclaimed on 20 June 1925. However, hard realities soon prevailed, and the sale of opium was again legalized in July.<sup>26</sup> On 1 August 1925, a new set of regulations was announced, marking a swing toward an ambitious policy of taking full control over the administration of opium.<sup>27</sup> The superintendent's office now came directly under the Ministry of Finance (part II, article 2),<sup>28</sup> an arrangement that revealed the extent to which opium was seen above all as a tax resource to be milked to the utmost in order to finance the Northern Expedition, for which preparations were gathering apace.

The preamble to the 1 August regulations introduced an approach that was to become a commonplace in the Guomindang narrative. Liu and

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<sup>23</sup> GMR, 28 May 1924.

<sup>24</sup> Tsin, *Nation, Governance and Modernity*, 103–114.

<sup>25</sup> Chereparov, *As Military Adviser in China*, 73–83.

<sup>26</sup> GMR, 23 June and 3 and 23 July 1925.

<sup>27</sup> This regulation is published in Ma Mozhen, *Zhongguo jindu shi ziliao*, 802–804. Its date of promulgation is confirmed by Herbert L. May, *Survey of Opium Smoking Conditions in the Far East* (New York: Opium Research Committee of the Foreign Policy Association, 1927).

<sup>28</sup> Besides, the Jinyan dubanshu opium administration was organized as two offices, one that managed the monopoly (*zhuanmaichu*) while the other (*chajinchu*) was in charge of surveillance and repression (part II, articles 3, 5, and 6).

Yang were held totally responsible for the problem of opium consumption such as it existed in 1925.<sup>29</sup> This reading of the situation, which was clearly indulgent toward the immediate past, overlooked two major points. First, Liu and Yang were not the only military leaders to have fostered the opium trade in the 1923–1925 period. Many generals loyal to the Guomindang, like Li Fulin, had acted similarly in the same period and even continued their activities after 1925. Second, while Liu and Yang had indeed contributed to the massive revival of opium consumption, the official narrative carefully avoided mentioning that the return of the narcotic at this time ended a state of total prohibition that been achieved at the end of 1922 by the personal efforts of Chen Jiongming, the very man whom the Guomindang saw in mid-1925 as a mortal enemy.

The notion that Liu and Yang were entirely responsible for the scale of opium consumption in mid-1920s Canton is, more generally, a commonplace view in most of the sources when they dwell on the situation in this period.<sup>30</sup> This idea is echoed by Chinese historians today who, like their predecessors, find material in these documents to justify Sun Yat-sen's actions, especially the creation of the Opium Suppression Superintendent's Office. They even depict the use of opium resources for the benefit of the Guomindang as a necessity dictated by the untrammelled use of the drug unleashed by warlords.<sup>31</sup>

The personality of the new head of the Opium Suppression Superintendent's Office clearly illustrates the way in which the Guomindang and the civilian administration had gradually regained full control. Fan Qiwu, appointed on 22 July by the province's finance minister, Liao Zhongkai,<sup>32</sup> was a civilian, habituated to technocratic positions: he had been controller of Maritime Customs in Guangdong, director of the province's telegraphs bureau, and controller of the salt tax. Fan Qiwu made vigorous efforts to eliminate opium trafficking but in vain as these activities continued to asphyxiate the office's activities.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup> For example: Guangdong Provincial Archives, *Zhoubao*, no. 60, 5 November 1928, 149: report by the provincial government to the central government committee for the suppression of opium on the situation in Guangdong concerning the suppression of drugs; *GJJ*, *lunwen* section, 10.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, *Guangdongsheng caizheng jishi, 1912–1923* [Report on the finances of Guangdong Province] (Canton: Guangdong caizhengting, 1934), 249; Chen Gongbo, *Kuxiao lu, 1925–1936* [Bitter laughter] (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1979), 22.

<sup>31</sup> Su Zhiliang, *Zhongguo dupin shi*, 294–295; Peng Jianxin, "Minguo shiqi Guangzhou," 31; Wang Jinxiang, "Guangzhou guomin zhengfu yapien zhengce tanlue," 52.

<sup>32</sup> Ma Mozhen, *Zhongguo jindu shi ziliao*, 805–806.

<sup>33</sup> Fan Qiwu's tussles with Li Fulin to stop the Honam area (controlled by the latter) from being a haven for underground opium houses is an illustration of this: see *GMR*, 17, 19, and 26 August 1925.

The fact is that real change came to the opium administration only after 20 September when Song Ziwen became finance minister of both the province and the national governments set up in July. In November, he set up a new structure under his direct control, the Jinyan zongchu (Opium Suppression Office)<sup>34</sup> on Yonghanbei Road near the Finance Ministry. It will be seen later that the Opium Suppression Office became considerably more efficient under Song's stewardship, benefiting from Canton's improved political climate.

The men now put in charge of the opium administration were fairly obscure individuals. Song Ziwen appointed cronies like Chen Ce, in December 1925,<sup>35</sup> and Li Chengyi, also one of his close collaborators, who succeeded Chen at the end of 1926.<sup>36</sup> These men simply relayed orders from Song who, as finance minister, made every major decision including one that led to the regulations of September/October 1926 redefining the functioning of the Opium Suppression Office in such a way as to tighten the government's grip over it.<sup>37</sup>

The departure of the national government to Wuhan, in December 1926, inaugurated a period of great instability at the top levels of the opium administration, and the tendency to appoint underlings as administrators was perpetuated.<sup>38</sup>

### The Post-Song Period

Deprived of Song Ziwen's direct support when the national government moved to Wuhan in December 1926, Li Chengyi was charged with embezzlement, and arrested and jailed in May 1927.<sup>39</sup> Meanwhile, a group identified by a contemporary as the "Gaozhou Clique"<sup>40</sup> took control of the finances of Guangdong Province for a few months (Gu Yingfen was at

<sup>34</sup> *Guangdongsheng caizheng jishi*, 249; *Shenbao*, 26 November 1925. This article also mentions the arrival of one Chen Fu at the head of the *jinyan zongchu*, but this individual, as it happened, was totally unknown. This could be a case of mistaken identity with Chen Ce, appointed at this time.

<sup>35</sup> *Huazi ribao*, 12 December 1925.

<sup>36</sup> Chen Dayou, "Yijiuerliu zhi yijiusansi," 119 and 124; Liu Shoulin, *Minguo zhiguan nianbiao*, 140–141.

<sup>37</sup> Regulations of 29 September, and 1, 4, and 28 October 1926, National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), reproduced in Ma Mozhen, *Zhongguo jindu shi ziliao*, 822–832; *Judu yuekan* 23 (July 1928): 48.

<sup>38</sup> According to a contemporary witness, the persons appointed to lead this body were moreover appointed in secrecy: Ye Shaohua, "Guangzhou jinyan quanli," 115.

<sup>39</sup> Thanks to personal intervention by Jiang Jieshi, Li Chengyi was almost immediately sent to Nanjing, where the charges against him were dismissed for want of proof: *Huazi ribao*, 6 and 24 May, 22 June, and 14 July 1927.

<sup>40</sup> Gaozhou is a town in the west of Guangdong Province, not far from the border with Guangxi.

the time director of the provincial finance bureau, a position he held from 9 July to 2 September 1927). One of the clique's members, Li Haiyun, was head of the Opium Suppression Office. However, with the downfall of Gu Yingfen and the Gaozhou Clique, orchestrated by Wang Jingwei's supporters among others, Li Haiyun was removed from his job and arrested in turn.<sup>41</sup>

On 1 December 1927, Feng Zhuwan became Guangdong's finance minister with the backing of Li Jishen, who had been running the province's military apparatus ever since the start of the Northern Expedition. Feng then provisionally appointed Ye Shaohua to succeed Li Haiyun. Ye disingenuously presents himself, in a *wenshi ziliao* of his own authorship, as a mere technocrat who had accepted the job purely out of a sense of obedience.<sup>42</sup> His replacement shortly afterward by Li Shiyong was a direct consequence of the warlord Zhang Fakui's return to Canton. Zhang, a native of Guangdong renowned for his brilliant military successes during the Northern Expedition, took advantage of Li Jishen's departure for Shanghai to sally out of Jiangxi with his troops in November and take hold of Canton, dislodging in the process Li Jishen's forces and those of the New Guangxi Clique (controlled at Canton by Huang Shaohong).<sup>43</sup> To add to the confusion, just as Li Jishen was getting ready to take back power with the help of Huang Shaohong's troops, the Communists, hoping to take advantage of differences among the Guomintang leaders, rose up and established the Commune of Canton (11–13 December 1927), which was quickly crushed when the local Guomintang leaders restored unity among themselves.<sup>44</sup> Li Shiyong was removed from his position after the Commune episode when Li Jishen returned on 4 January 1928 and took charge of the situation in Guangdong. Chen Xiong,<sup>45</sup> who was linked to the Guangxi warlords, and especially to Li Zongren, was appointed chief of the opium bureau.

<sup>41</sup> *Huazi ribao*, 28 June 1927; Ye Shaohua, "Guangzhou jinyan quanli," 116.

<sup>42</sup> Ye Shaohua, "Guangzhou jinyan quanli," 112–117.

<sup>43</sup> Howard Boorman, *Biographical Dictionary of Republican China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), 205–208, 292–295; Yang Wanxiu, *Guangzhou jianshi*, 468–472. The New Guangxi Clique (Huang Shaohong, Li Congren, Bai Chongxi) had sprung from its eponymous province in 1925. For the time being, it was allied with the Guomintang, having taken part in the Northern Expedition. At this time, a part of the Guomintang forces stationed in Guangdong were troops of the New Guangxi Clique whose leaders therefore exercised major influence on the province's affairs.

<sup>44</sup> Harold Isaacs, *The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution* (<https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/isaacs/1938/tcr/ch05.htm>, accessed on 6 January 2017). For an overview of the Canton Commune, see Dirlik, "Narrativizing Revolution," 363–397.

<sup>45</sup> Ye Shaohua, "Guangzhou jinyan quanli," 115; Chen Dayou, "Yijiuerliu zhi yijiusansi," 127.

The event that finally put an end to the game of musical chairs among opium bureau chiefs and brought a relatively important personality to the helm came about shortly thereafter when Chen Jitang, a rising star in the province ever since he had decisively helped Li Jishen remove Zhang Fakui,<sup>46</sup> managed to bring in none other than his own brother, Chen Weizhou.<sup>47</sup> Chen was to remain in this position right up to the creation of the new Guangdongsheng jinyanju (Guangdong Province Opium Suppression Bureau: see chapter 2) in December 1929, when the opium administration was entrusted to Chen Yuheng, a relative of Chen Mingshu who had been sharing power with Chen Jitang since Li Jishen's departure at the beginning of 1929.

It is clear that after Song Ziwen's departure, the ability to appoint the chief of the opium administration became a major prize in the power struggles that characterized the period. The frequent upheavals in these offices only reflected the shifting balance of forces between the various groups that made up the provincial government. This does not mean that the dominant faction of the day would necessarily seize and keep hold of the opium administration, which, after all, was only one of the prizes in the bargaining process. Thus, Chen Xiong's replacement by Chen Weizhou 1928 did not mean that the former's backers, the Guangxi Clique, had been pushed out of the scene.<sup>48</sup> Nor did Chen Yuheng's promotion to this position in December 1929, succeeding Chen Weizhou, mean that the fortunes of the latter's brother, Chen Jitang, were on the wane. The fact is that, just as in the previous two examples, there is no precise explanation available for some of these changes. At times, they took the form of spectacular coups such as Zhang Fakui's capture of Canton. Usually, they corresponded to barely perceptible modifications or redefinitions of the balance of forces between the different factions that could lead to the departure of one bureau chief or another.

From 1925 onward there was some stability in the institutions responsible for managing opium, followed in the 1928–1929 period by changes in the organization of the opium departments. The opium administration changed its name several times. In June 1928, the Jinyan zongchu, which had been created in November 1925, was replaced by a short-lived Jinyanju (Opium Suppression Office) that lasted only until 1 September of that year, to be succeeded by the Guangdong caizhengting jinyanke

<sup>46</sup> Yang Wanxiu, *Guangzhou jianshi*, 476.

<sup>47</sup> Cross-checking various documents indicates that Chen Weizhou took office in the first half of 1928, probably in the second quarter, but I have not been able to obtain a more precise date: cf. XGR, 3 August 1928, translated in FO 371/13252.

<sup>48</sup> The eviction of the clique came a month later, at the beginning of 1929: Yang Wanxiu, *Guangzhou jianshi*, 476–477.



(Guangdong Finance Ministry Opium Suppression Department). On 1 July 1929, this structure was transformed into the Caizhengting diwuke (Finance Ministry Fifth Department).<sup>49</sup> Finally, this Caizhengting diwuke was abolished and replaced on 1 December 1929, by a new Guangdong-sheng jinyanju (Guangdong Province Opium Suppression Bureau),<sup>50</sup> which for its part lasted up to the summer of 1936.

In March 1929, Li Jishen, deemed by Jiang Jieshi as being far too independent, especially in his management of the province's finances, was arrested in Nanjing at the Guomindang Third National Congress. Power in the province was thereafter shared between Chen Jitang and Chen Mingshu even though the pair enjoyed a lesser degree of independence. Fan Qiwu's appointment as Guangdong's finance minister reflected the resumption of central authority over the province,<sup>51</sup> as well as the Nanjing government's ability to make its weight felt, especially in opium-related matters.<sup>52</sup> Song Ziwen's inspection visit in July 1929 was another sign of the power wielded by the central authorities. So was the dispatch of a deputy director, Zheng Guanwu,<sup>53</sup> to the Guangdong Province Opium Suppression Bureau in July 1930. Zheng was appointed by the central finance minister, who expressed concern over the drop in provincial opium revenues. Again, most significantly, whereas the opium revenues under Li Jishen had been channeled into the provincial treasuries,<sup>54</sup> Song Ziwen now got them paid entirely into the national budget.<sup>55</sup> In short, the central authority benefited from the mutual neutralization of the Chens (Chen Jitang and Chen Mingshu) after Li Jishen's departure and from the fact that neither of them was powerful enough to be able to impose his personal authority over the province.<sup>56</sup>

These two years (1929–1931) form a short interlude amid two decades (1916–1936) of Guangdong's independence from the central authorities (when such authorities did exist) in matters of opium policy. This period

<sup>49</sup> *Huazi ribao*, 6 June 1928; Chen Dayou, "Yijiuerliu zhi yijiusansi," 128; *Judu yuekan* 26 (December 1928): 68; *YHB*, 12 July 1929.

<sup>50</sup> Chen Dayou, "Yijiuerliu zhi yijiusansi," 130; *Guangdongsheng caizheng jishi*, 249; *Canton Gazette*, 28 November 1929.

<sup>51</sup> John Fitzgerald, "Increased Disunity: The Politics and Finance of Guangdong Separatism, 1926–1936," *Modern Asian Studies* 24, no. 4 (1990): 762–763.

<sup>52</sup> FO 415, report by the consul in Canton, 16 May 1930.

<sup>53</sup> *YHB*, 12 July 1929 and 20 July 1930.

<sup>54</sup> Fitzgerald, "Increased Disunity," 762.

<sup>55</sup> Huo Qifang, "Guangdong shengshi caizheng zhi huafen" [The division of finances in Guangdong between the provincial and municipal levels], *Shehui kexue luncong* [Annals of scientific sociology] 3, no. 1 (1931): 125; *YHB*, 15 May 1934.

<sup>56</sup> Alfred Lin, "Building and Funding a Warlord Regime: The Experience of Chen Jitang in Guangdong, 1929–1936," *Modern China* 28, no. 2 (2002): 180–181.



ended on 28 May 1931, when a dissident national government was formed in Canton including major figures in the Guomindang (Chen Jitang, Gu Yingfen, Wang Jingwei, Sun Ke) who were hostile to Jiang Jieshi's personal power. Even if their dissidence ended in failure, thereby opening the gates to the establishment of Chen Jitang's personal authority, it triggered the departure of Chen Mingshu, who had remained loyal to Jiang.<sup>57</sup> The natural consequence of this was upheaval in the current opium administration, the Guangdong Province Opium Suppression Bureau. This administration had been under Chen Mingshu's control from its very beginnings (its director, Chen Yuheng, was a close relative). But then Zhou Jingzhen, a new director fully loyal to Chen Jitang, took charge in mid-May.<sup>58</sup> Nanjing once again lost all scope of influence over opium-related questions in the province.

An overview of these seven years shows that the revenues obtained from the opium circuits became a major bone of contention in the struggles among political factions. This explains the succession of directors. In addition to the struggles among the different elements of the Guangdong government, there was the question of relations between the provincial authorities and the central government, which intended to keep full control over this major source of revenue.

*Government Monopoly or Farming: The Search for the Best Compromise to Maximize Receipts, 1923–1931*

Independently of the constant upheavals in management, the opium administration underwent organizational changes throughout this period. These were intended to maximize revenues. An adequate description of this search for efficiency necessarily requires a close look at the various successive opium offices and bureaus that functioned under numerous extremely precise and detailed regulations. The question is wide-ranging and attention must be focused on the heart of the problem: the way in which the thrust of the opium policy was divided between bureaucratic organization and freedom of action for the traders.<sup>59</sup> The fact is that

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<sup>57</sup> Boorman, *Biographical Dictionary of Republican China*, 160–162, 214–216; Lin, "Building and Funding a Warlord Regime," 181–182.

<sup>58</sup> *Huazi ribao*, 16 May 1931.

<sup>59</sup> This arbitration was neither a novel development nor was it specific to the question of opium revenues in Guangdong. Each of these two systems, public monopoly and farming, had its advantages and drawbacks, which had already been discussed at length by the philosophers of the French Enlightenment, and memorably in a debate between Montesquieu and Pesselier: Yves Durand, *Les fermiers généraux au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: PUF [Presses universitaires de France], 1971), 50.

Guangdong authorities never took a clear position in favor of either one of these two models of organization but combined them in a variety of configurations.

From Yang Xiyan to Fan Qiwu

The regulations set forth on 16 January 1924 stipulated that the departments of the superintendent would manage the entire opium circuit and did not allow for the possibility of farming out the trade (article 2).<sup>60</sup> In reality, however, the distribution of opium belonging to the monopoly was very soon farmed out to traders selected on the basis of the amounts of prepared opium that they committed themselves to selling in the various geographical areas allocated to them.<sup>61</sup> The administration took responsibility for the suppression of fraud, the supply of raw opium (even when it limited itself to purchasing opium from the traders at Wuzhou or even Canton), and the manufacture of prepared opium, for which Yang hired professional boilers.<sup>62</sup>

On 13 April 1924, when Lu Diping was chief, it was decided to farm out the entire opium business for Canton city to the Wanyi company ("Man-yick" in the Western sources). This practice of treating Canton as a separate case had already been seen under Long Jiguang and was frequently resorted to thereafter. As the main area for opium consumption in the province, Canton was a particularly important source of opium-related revenues. Besides, as the capital of the provincial authority, Canton was also a place where surveillance was more easily conducted than in isolated areas.<sup>63</sup>

This farming-out operation was actually more of an expedient than a well-thought-out policy designed to increase opium revenues in the long term. Its main attraction clearly lay in the fact that the Wanyi consortium, headed by a certain Li Shiguang, agreed to lend the government \$100,000 in addition to a deposit of \$50,000, sums that came as a breath of oxygen to the province's asphyxiated finances.<sup>64</sup> It soon turned out that Wanyi

<sup>60</sup> Ma Mozhen, *Zhongguo jindu shi ziliao*, 762–764.

<sup>61</sup> Regulations published in the *Guangzhou minguo ribao*, 22 and 23 January 1924.

<sup>62</sup> MAE, Série Asie 1918–29, Sous-série affaires communes, file no. 55, report by the consul in Canton replying to the circular dated 24 January 1924; National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), series no. 679 (Maritime Customs), file no. 14220, Canton district occurrences (January–June 1924), report dated 12 January 1924.

<sup>63</sup> A development in July 1936, at a time when the Guomindang was retaking the province, appears to be significant. The first GMD envoys to reach the province felt that the new system of opium distribution could be set up very quickly in Canton but that much more time would be needed to extend it to the rest of the province: National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), file 41/519, report to Jiang Jieshi, 15 September 1936.

<sup>64</sup> *Canton Gazette*, 8 April 1924; a report by the Maritime Customs nevertheless mentions a figure of \$200,000: National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), series no. 679 (Maritime Customs), file

had made a bad deal. Competition from parallel circuits managed by the warlords caused the company to use up all its capital, and it managed to get its contract rescinded in November 1924.<sup>65</sup> Xie Guoguang then decided to redistribute the sale of opium separately to other traders, probably on more favorable terms, in each of the twelve police zones.<sup>66</sup> This first experiment with total leasing in Canton therefore ended in failure.

Relations between the administration and the traders were redefined under Fan Qiwu, after the elimination of Liu and Yang and the expansion of the areas under Guomindang control. Just as in January 1924, the new regulations published in July 1925 make no reference to farming. On the contrary, the description of the departments (*ke*) that made up the bureau (article 3 of the regulations) suggests that the superintendent's office was to take responsibility for opium from procurement (*caibanke*) right up to distribution (*faxingke*).<sup>67</sup> However, in the weeks that followed, contracts were made with companies that took out concessions for the supply of raw opium to the superintendent's office.<sup>68</sup> Thus, the Anhua company made a contract with Fan Qiwu on 8 August for the supply of 1,000 cases of Persian opium.<sup>69</sup> Thereafter, regulations were published for farming out the transportation of raw opium toward the interior of the province, in areas totally devoid of official administration. The concessions were granted to the Futong and Zhenhua companies, which acted under the title of Transport Monopoly Bureau of the Opium Superintendent (*Jinyan dubanshu zhuan yunchu*).<sup>70</sup> The raw opium transported by these companies, imported and compulsorily certified by the superintendent's office

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no. 14220, Canton district occurrences (January–June 1924), report dated 2 May 1924; *GMR*, 3 November 1924.

<sup>65</sup> *GMR*, 2 and 3 September 1924.

<sup>66</sup> *GMR*, 5 and 18 November 1924.

<sup>67</sup> National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), reproduced in Ma Mozhen, *Zhongguo jindu shi ziliao*, 802–804.

<sup>68</sup> National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), series no. 19, file no. 114; report by Song Ziwen to the national government dated 26 September 1925 reproduced in Ma Mozhen, *Zhongguo jindu shi ziliao*, 812–814.

<sup>69</sup> Slack, *Opium, State, and Society*, 74.

<sup>70</sup> A set of regulations dated 29 August 1925 contained a part called the *Jinyan dubanshu zhuan yunchu zhangcheng* [Regulations for the Transport Monopoly Bureau of the Opium Superintendent's Office] and a part called the *Zhenhua gongsi renxiang chengban*, the *Jinyan dubanshu zhuan yunchu zhangcheng* [Regulations on the farming to the Zhenhua Company of the Transport Monopoly Bureau of the Opium Superintendent's Office]. Another set of regulations, *Jinyan dubanshu Guangdong quan sheng zhuan yunchu jianzhang* [Abridged statutes of the Transport Bureau of the Opium Superintendent's Office for the entire province] mentions Futong as the company farming the transportation of raw opium within the province. These regulations are in the National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), series no. 19, file no. 114, and reproduced in Ma Mozhen, *Zhongguo jindu shi ziliao*, 809–813. The way in which the trans-

in Canton where the bureau's head office was situated (articles 2 and 4), circulated in the province and was then processed by these companies in the different regions (articles 7, 9, 10, 11) covered by the regulations of the Transport Monopoly Bureau of the Opium Superintendent.

Canton once again received special treatment: whereas the opium administration did not extend similar attention to the rest of the Guomindang-controlled territory, in Canton it kept a tight grip over the direct management of the preparation and sale of opium (articles 3, 9, 14).<sup>71</sup> The situation during the very brief spell when Fan Qiwu was the opium superintendent was therefore characterized by recourse to a variety of different companies to carry out the essential part of the work.

#### Song Ziwen's Policy and Its Durability

Upon taking charge of the government finances in September 1925, Song Ziwen undertook an intensive reform of the Guomindang's general tax policy, departing especially from the practice of farming that had hitherto applied to practically every tax levied.<sup>72</sup> In doing so, he managed to significantly increase tax receipts. Curiously, however, he did not do the same for opium. Impelled by the same desire to increase income in order to finance the Northern Expedition, as he himself explained in a report on 26 September 1925,<sup>73</sup> he resorted on the contrary to a blockwise farming policy, granting the monopoly to the Gongcheng company at the end of 1925.<sup>74</sup> A few months later, Song had a change of attitude. Between May and the end of July 1926, a new company, Xingyuan, took over from Gongcheng, but only in the procurement of raw opium supplies. Unfortunately, little more is known about this company than about its predecessor—except that the powerful businessman Huo Zhiting played a major role in it and was probably its main shareholder.<sup>75</sup> Thereafter, Song Ziwen apportioned the operations and geographical areas among different companies ac-

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portation of opium was divided in practice between these two companies remains cloaked in mystery despite the existence of these regulations.

<sup>71</sup> Regulations dated 29 August 1925, National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), reproduced in Ma Mozhen, *Zhongguo jindu shi ziliao*, 809–811.

<sup>72</sup> Li Guoqi, "Song Ziwen dui Guangdong de caizheng gexin" [The reform of Guangdong's finances by Song Ziwen], in *Zhonghua minguochushi lishi yantaohui lunwenji* [Proceedings of the Conference on the Beginnings of the Chinese Republic], Academia Sinica, Taipei, 1984, 487, cited by Slack, *Opium, State, and Society*, 77.

<sup>73</sup> Report by Song Ziwen to the national government dated 26 September 1925, National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), reproduced in Ma Mozhen, *Zhongguo jindu shi ziliao*, 814.

<sup>74</sup> Slack, *Opium, State, and Society*, 78.

<sup>75</sup> National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), report by Song Ziwen dated 29 September 1925 presenting the new regulations on opium to the national government, reproduced in Ma Mozhen, *Zhongguo jindu shi ziliao*, 822–825; Slack, *Opium, State, and Society*, 78.

cording to a program that seems to have been more carefully conceived. The success of the Northern Expedition in extending the territory under Guomindang control certainly pushed him in this direction. He then very carefully marked out the boundaries of the concession holders' activities in a series of regulations published one after the other on 29 September, 1 October, 4 October, and finally 28 October 1926,<sup>76</sup> which were to be applied throughout the country (article 1 of the regulation of 29 September). These very detailed regulations sought to control and manage the activity of the traders, who were subjected to deliberately stringent administrative controls designed to limit fraud.

To begin with, the 29 September regulations presented the new *Jinyan yaogao zhuanmai zongju* (Central Medicinal Paste Monopoly Office), which depended directly on the Opium Suppression Office (they had the same director, as it happened),<sup>77</sup> an institution responsible for the supply, preparation, and transportation of opium. Like the earlier regulations, this one maintained the fiction of direct control. The quality of administrative control was the subject of the 1 October regulations on relations between local agencies of the opium administration (*jinyanju*),<sup>78</sup> extensively developed by Song,<sup>79</sup> and the Opium Suppression Office, on which they directly depended and to which they had to make frequent and precise reports. Significantly, the directors of the local agencies were directly appointed by the finance minister. Song Ziwen also strove to create additional inspection posts (*jianchasuo* and *jianchaka*) all along the main opium routes, especially the Western River and the Dongxing coastal region, and had armed boats patrolling the Pearl River Delta.<sup>80</sup>

However, it is very clear from the 4 October and 28 October regulations that the role of these local agencies was limited to managing the different permits and to repressing fraud, because the essential part of the work was entrusted to the traders who took out farming concessions (sometime

<sup>76</sup> National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), series no. 19, file no. 113, reproduced in Ma Mozhen, *Zhongguo jindu shi ziliao*, 822–832.

<sup>77</sup> Article 3 of the 29 September regulations, reproduced in Ma Mozhen, *Zhongguo jindu shi ziliao*, 823.

<sup>78</sup> I shall call them "local agencies" and not *jinyanju* to avoid confusion with the Guangdongsheng *jinyanju*, as the general opium administration was known between December 1929 and September 1936. To complicate matters, there were two other *jinyanju*, one under Long Jiguang and the other that was operational from June 1928 to September 1928.

<sup>79</sup> Chen Dayou, "Yijiuerliu zhi yijiusansi," 125, refers to these agencies as "*jinyanfenju*." Although Song Ziwen increased their number, they had already existed from 1925 onwards, having been set up mainly along the Western River (FO 415, memorandum respecting the opium problem in the Far East, 10 August 1929).

<sup>80</sup> Cf articles 1, 3, 9 of the regulations of 1 October 1926; Chen Dayou, "Yijiuerliu zhi yijiusansi," 125.

accumulating them) for the procurement, transportation, and sale, both wholesale and retail, of raw opium in the province and even, in several areas, for the production of prepared opium.<sup>81</sup> The 28 October regulations, which give a detailed description of the types of permits that the traders had to obtain from the authorities, clearly shows that these traders were under surveillance by the local agencies: they had to comply with a sophisticated system of permits and quotas and had to put down huge deposits (of up to 10,000 yuan).<sup>82</sup> But such strict controls could be applied only to opium flows within the province. Unlike the small traders and local boilers, the bigger traders and especially the powerful companies who brought raw opium in convoys from distant provinces and were able to negotiate the most favorable terms with the government remained fairly free in their operations.<sup>83</sup>

Song's approach was also pragmatic. He knew that total control was impossible and that fraud was inevitable. To minimize fraud, not only did he reinforce the means of surveillance but he also imposed sales quotas on the opium traders, with penalties for those who did not reach these quotas within set deadlines.<sup>84</sup> This system had already been used in 1915. It did not eliminate the possibility of fraud. The merchants could still blend opium and trade in quantities over and above their allotted quotas. This was a pragmatic approach since overstringent controls would paradoxically reduce tax income. Between legality with very low profit and illegality with high profit, many traders would very probably choose the latter. Song Ziwen's system on the contrary allowed for moderate cheating with increased profits. The controls were designed to reduce fraud to reasonable proportions, not to eliminate it. The opium traders were bound by the quota system, which encouraged them to make every effort to reach these quotas and even exceed them as far as possible so as to have surpluses that they could then blend on the side with contraband opium.

All in all, Song Ziwen's work of reorganization impels us to revise the widespread view of him as a diehard opponent of farming and a champion of administrative control over the different taxes. For opium, he was quite happy to go in for a mix of stronger administrative controls with a policy of farming, and he worked to apportion the tasks among the

<sup>81</sup> Regulations of 28 October 1926, reproduced in Ma Mozhen, *Zhongguo jindu shi ziliao*, 829–832.

<sup>82</sup> Regulations of 28 October 1926, articles 3 to 13, in Ma Mozhen, *Zhongguo jindu shi ziliao*, 829–830.

<sup>83</sup> Regulations of 28 October 1926, articles 2, 4 and 15, in Ma Mozhen, *Zhongguo jindu shi ziliao*, 829–830; Chen Dayou, "Yijiuierliu zhi yijiusansi," 120.

<sup>84</sup> Regulations of 28 October 1926, articles 3 and 8, in Ma Mozhen, *Zhongguo jindu shi ziliao*, 829–830.

different farmers. This system proved to be suited to the situation, and it is fairly well established that it led to a major increase in opium revenues in Guangdong between 1926 and 1928.<sup>85</sup> Given its results, the system lived on as could be expected and saw no major change after Song's departure. To go by the account in one *wenshi ziliao*, even after Li Chengyi's arrest, the administrative organization of opium continued to bear the stamp of Song Ziwen's time as finance minister.<sup>86</sup>

However, the appointment of the Liangyue company on 1 September 1928 marked a turning point so spectacular that it aroused the attentions of complacent Western diplomats.<sup>87</sup> It was rumored that the Liangyue company was paying the authorities a monthly sum of \$700,000.<sup>88</sup> The company itself made contracts with about twenty subfarmers responsible for the different districts of the province.<sup>89</sup> The leasing company kept the monopoly of sales in Canton for itself.<sup>90</sup>

By returning once again to the blockwise farming system, the authorities hoped to halt the decrease in income from opium over the previous several months.<sup>91</sup> This decrease they attributed to massive and illegal imports of opium from Guangxi with the connivance of certain warlords in that province.<sup>92</sup> By granting this tax farming concession to the Liangyue company, the authorities thought to neutralize this inconvenient inflow of illegal opium. What they wanted was to integrate raw opium supplies from Guangxi into the official system, although for years (as we have seen

<sup>85</sup> The sources differ over the figures but are unanimous about the trend: they all describe an increase in opium revenues from 1926 to 1928: Chen Dayou, "Yijiuerliu zhi yijiusansi," 125; MAE, Série Asie 1918–29, Sous-série affaires communes, file no. 56, letter from the French Consulate in Canton, 5 September 1928; *Guangdongsheng caizheng jishi*, 252; Article from the newspaper *Xianggang gongshang ribao*, 3 August 1928, cited and translated in FO 371/13252. This question shall be returned to.

<sup>86</sup> Chen Dayou, "Yijiuerliu zhi yijiusansi," 127.

<sup>87</sup> MAE, Série Asie 1918–29, Sous-série affaires communes, file no. 56, letter from the French Consulate in Canton dated 5 September 1928; FO 371/13252, report dated 29 August 1928 from the consul in Canton to the Embassy.

<sup>88</sup> FO 415, "Memorandum respecting the opium problem in the Far East," 10 August 1929; *Minguo ribao*, 24 August 1928; Zhonghua guomin juduhui, *Zhongguo yanhuo nianjian* [Year-book on the ravages of opium-smoking] (Shanghai, 1931), 30.

<sup>89</sup> YHB, 4 September 1928.

<sup>90</sup> MAE, Série Asie 1918–29, Sous-série affaires communes, file no. 56, letter from the French consul in Canton dated 28 September 1928, to the chargé d'affaires of France in China.

<sup>91</sup> *Huazi ribao*, 9 August 1928.

<sup>92</sup> MAE, Série Asie 1918–29, Sous-série affaires communes, file no. 56, letter from the French consul in Canton of 5 September 1928; letter from *Jinyan zongchu* to Huang Shaohong, president of the Guangxi provincial government, printed in the *GMR*, 27 June 1928; the *Guangdongsheng caizheng jishi* gave annual figures for the period 1926–1922 (252), which point to a degree of stagnation and even a slight drop in 1928 and 1929.



even after Song Ziwen's reforms) these supplies had been controlled by powerful companies that transported opium up to Canton or Wuzhou.<sup>93</sup> The establishment of the Liangyue company was the culmination of many months of negotiations initiated by Chen Weizhou between the provincial authorities of Guangdong and Guangxi.<sup>94</sup> The Liangyue company, as its name indicated, combined the interests of both provinces. Huo Zhiting possessed half of its shares. The Guangxi generals had shares too. Two brothers (Huang Zhongan and Huang Tianze) of the Guangxi provincial government president, Huang Shaohong, were among the company's administrators.<sup>95</sup> Thus, it was now wholly in the interest of the Guangxi leaders to stop turning a blind eye to opium smuggling into Guangdong since that not only hampered the activities of the leasing company in the province but, above all, rebounded against their own interests. This new strategy also reflected the major influence wielded by the Guangxi Clique in Canton affairs, which, as we have seen, had already lead to the promotion of Chen Xiong to director of the bureau in early 1928.

The break between Guangdong and Guangxi at the beginning of 1929 ended the existence of the Liangyue company. Following Li Jishen's arrest by Jiang Jieshi on 21 March in Shanghai, hostilities broke out between Guangdong, under the Jiang Jieshi loyalists Chen Jitang and Chen Mingshu, and Guangxi, led by the warlords Li Zongren, Huang Shaohong, and Bai Chongxi.<sup>96</sup> The Liangyue company therefore stopped working on 1 April 1929.<sup>97</sup>

The short-lived Finance Ministry Fifth Department in 1929 farmed out only the entire transportation of opium—imports as well as conveyance into the interior of the province—to the Tongyun company.<sup>98</sup> What happened to the other sections of the circuits remains unclear.

<sup>93</sup> Chen Dayou, "Yijiuerliu zhi yijiusansi," 120; Regulations of 28 October 1926, articles 2, 4, and 15, in Ma Mozhen, *Zhongguo jindu shi ziliao*, 829–830.

<sup>94</sup> Article in *Xianggang gongshang ribao*, 3 August 1928, cited and translated in FO 371/13252. Chen Weizhou reportedly tried to get the Indochina authorities to let him transport opium from Yunnan through Haiphong, so that he could avoid paying levies in Guangxi.

<sup>95</sup> Huang Zhongan's name appears in different variants in the sources and must be taken with caution: FO 371/13252, report dated 29 August 1928 from the consul in Canton to the Embassy; MAE, Série Asie 1918–29, Sous-série affaires communes, file no. 56, letter from the French Consulate in Canton dated 5 September 1928; *Shenbao*, 3 August 1928.

<sup>96</sup> Yang Wanxiu, *Guangzhou jianshi*, 477.

<sup>97</sup> *Guangdongsheng caizheng jishi*, 249; *Zhonghua guomin juduhui, Zhongguo yanhuo nianjian*, 30.

<sup>98</sup> According to the *Report of the Government of Hong Kong for the Calendar Year 1930 on the Traffic in Opium and Dangerous Drugs* (Hong Kong: Noronha and Cie), the company took charge, inside the province, only of the transport of raw opium. However, the permit accompanying the cargo transported by the company in March 1930 and seized between Can-



Set up in December 1929, the new Opium Suppression Bureau continued the policy of farming out these operations of transportation to Tongyun.<sup>99</sup> The company fitted out three vessels that took charge of transporting opium and curbing contraband activities.<sup>100</sup> It had trading outlets at Canton as well as Wuzhou and Dongxing,<sup>101</sup> two cities situated at the terminal points of very important opium routes, whence opium convoys could be dispatched to the different parts of the province. In May 1931, the Tongyun company lost its position, as a collateral victim of Chen Jitang's seizure of power. The office then resumed control of the transportation of the narcotic, and the management of opium was reorganized in ways that shall be examined in the next section.<sup>102</sup>

This account of relations between the opium administration and the traders that served it needs to be tempered. The paucity of the sources is such that it is often impossible to provide any precise description of the apportionment of tasks among the farming companies and the opium administration. However, it seems possible to assert that, in the 1923–1931 period, the compromise between bureaucratic organization and delegation to traders was the norm and that their relations were generally governed by the principle of “*guandu shangban*” (official supervision, merchant management).<sup>103</sup>

*The Guangdong Province Opium Suppression Bureau under Chen Jitang:  
A Possible Return to Equilibrium*

From 1931 onward, political stability and the organization of opium went hand-in-hand, bringing about a relatively permanent and balanced system that is more clearly perceptible in the documents than in previous years. Having emerged from trial and error, this stability henceforth made for substantial revenues that fed Chen Jitang's war chest.

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ton and Shantou by the Hong Kong Customs shows that the company could probably also transport prepared opium.

<sup>99</sup> *Guohuabao*, 22 June 1929, translated and cited in the file Aix, GGI 64937; Archives of Guangdong Province, series no. 95/1 (Kowloon customs), microfilm no. 639, opinion by the Canton government dated 30 July 1929.

<sup>100</sup> Archives of Guangdong Province, series no. 95/1 (Kowloon customs), microfilm no. 639, opinion by the Canton government in December 1929.

<sup>101</sup> *Guohuabao*, 22 June 1929, translated and cited in the file GGI 64937.

<sup>102</sup> Archives of Guangdong Province, series no. 95/1 (Kowloon customs), microfilm no. 639, note dated 22 May 1931 from the Canton superintendent of customs to the chief of the Kowloon bureau.

<sup>103</sup> *Renjianshi*, no. 38, 20 October 1935, 19. The expression *guandu shangban* had already been used in the creation and management of the great industrial complexes (for the production of armaments and steel) based on Western technology and born out of the self-strengthening (*zhiqiang*) policy launched in the 1860s.

The administrative body that managed the supply and sale of opium from Guangdong under Chen Jitang remained the same throughout the 1931–1936 period. This body was the Guangdong Province Opium Suppression Bureau (Guangdongsheng jinyanju). Established on 1 December 1929;<sup>104</sup> it was effectively taken over by Chen Jitang upon Zhou Jingzhen's appointment as its manager. Zhou and his successors, Wen Zhongsheng (1932) and finally Chen Yukun (1936),<sup>105</sup> were men devoted to Chen Jitang.<sup>106</sup> The striking observation that the suppression bureau directors remained in office for considerably longer periods than their predecessors does not fully explain how the managerial cadres of the opium administration became more stable. The fact—and contemporary observers are unanimous on this point—is that the men parachuted into the directorship of the bureau did not actually wield any real power.

During these five years, it was Huo Zhiting who was the real boss of the opium circuits.<sup>107</sup> His personal hold over these circuits was a major stepping stone in the development of his business interests. He had taken part in the opium trade for several years and already could be seen as an indispensable player in the field. However, his earlier activities had been devoted to procuring raw opium supplies for Guangdong from the interior provinces without any involvement in downstream trading.<sup>108</sup> According to one contemporary report, it was at the request of Chen Jitang, who judged him to be capable of paying a much higher fee for the privilege,

<sup>104</sup> *Guangdongsheng caizheng jishi*, 249.

<sup>105</sup> Chen and Wen can be seen together in a rare photograph in the *Xianggang gongshang ribao* dated 17 March 1936.

<sup>106</sup> The precise order of succession of the *jinyanju* directors from 1929 to 1936 has been ascertained by cross-checking the following documents: Chen Dayou, "Yijiuerliu zhi yijiu-sansi," 130; YHB, 17 May 1930, 8 October 1931; *Huazi ribao*, 29 July 1932; FO 415, report by the consul in Canton dated 16 May 1930; *Minguo ribao*, 22 June 1931; *Canton Gazette*, 18 March 1936; XGR, 17 March and 6 April 1936; Archives of Guangdong Province, series no. 2/2, file no. 78, opinion of the Guangdong *jinyanju* dated 7 February 1934; FO 371/14759, letter no. 1621 of the Guangdong province opium suppression office.

<sup>107</sup> See, for example, *Renjianshi*, no. 38, 20 October 1935, 19; Wei Gong, "Bashi nian lai Guangdong de 'jin du' he kaidu" [Gambling and prohibition of gambling in Guangdong for the past eighty years], *Guangdong wenshi ziliao* [Historical materials for Guangdong] 16 (1964): 111.

<sup>108</sup> Zhu Chunting, *Guangdong duwang*, 278. We have already seen that he played a part in the Xingyuan and Liangyue companies. Huo Zhiting was also, for example, one of the three main shareholders of the Sanyou company that took charge, from 1928 onwards, of opium production in Guangzhouwan and undertook smuggling into Hong Kong: Cai Daguang, "Guangzhouwan 'Sanyou gongsi'" [The Sanyou company in Guangzhouwan], in *Zhanjiang wenshi ziliao* (Zhanjiang: Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi, Zhanjiangshi weiyuanhui wenshi ziliao yanjiu weiyuanhui, 1990), vol. 9, pp. 75–80. The available sources, as presently constituted, probably disclose only a limited part of his activities.

that Huo took charge of the entire sector.<sup>109</sup> Despite the importance of his role, Huo always hewed to his strategy of working behind the scenes and almost never appearing in the foreground.

Another aspect of Huo's approach was to distribute money liberally not only to the directors of the opium administration (to ensure full control of it), but also to the military chiefs. It is estimated that he paid out sums equal to about half of the official fee itself.<sup>110</sup> This must be seen as a stratagem to discourage individuals who could have organized trafficking on their own account as had happened so often in the past. While Huo was very generous with the major higher officials, such as Yu Hanmou,<sup>111</sup> he could also count on Chen Jitang's severity and well-advised self-interest in the prohibition of smuggling by his own subordinates. Besides, in order to stop trafficking by the military, Chen set up a commission responsible for the fair distribution of opium revenues among the different parts of his army that sent representatives to the commission.<sup>112</sup> Thus, having received shares of the revenue from the general opium distribution system, the military chiefs were less inclined to resort to smuggling, and it became possible to achieve a general consensus in order to maintain the status quo in opium management.<sup>113</sup>

In order to deal with trafficking unsupported by administrative or military power, Huo Zhiting acquired substantial means to combat smuggling.<sup>114</sup> He did not, however, venture to seek direct control over opium throughout the province and wisely continued the system of subfarming to local traders,<sup>115</sup> delegation to traders suitably allotted minimum quotas of sale, and imposing preliminary payment of large guarantee deposits—a recipe that had already proved to be successful.

<sup>109</sup> Wu Xiangheng, "Wo suo zhidao de Huo Zhiting" [Huo Zhiting as I knew him], in *Guangzhoushi zhengxie wenshi ziliao yanjiuyuanhui, Nantian suiyue, Chen Jitang zhu yue shiqi jianwen shilu* [Year in the South, Record of things seen and heard during Chen Jitang's rule in Guangdong] (Canton: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1987), 328.

<sup>110</sup> To be precise, \$400,000 to \$500,000 (report dated 15 September 1936 to Jiang Jieshi, National Archives No. 2 [Nanjing], series no. 41, file no. 519).

<sup>111</sup> Wu Xiangheng, "Wo suo zhidao de Huo Zhiting," 328; Zhu Chunting, *Guangdong duwang*, 357.

<sup>112</sup> Cen Sanchu, "Yanduchang zhi yi ban" [The filth of prostitution, gambling, and opium], in Zhang Yu and Wang Juan, *Lao Guangzhou xiezha* [A portrait of old-time Canton] (Hefei: Anhui wenyi chubanshe, 1991).

<sup>113</sup> On the scale of the trafficking organized by low-level officials as seen on a nationwide scale, cf. Zhu Qingbao, *Yapian yu jindai Zhongguo*, 126–127.

<sup>114</sup> CO 825/19/6, report by the consul in Canton dated 16 August 1935; Zhu Chunting, *Guangdong duwang*, 283.

<sup>115</sup> *Renjianshi*, no. 38, 20 October 1935, 19; MAE, SDN/LON series, Sous-série secrétariat général, file no. 1642, dispatch from the consul in Shantou dated 22 January 1935.

Huo Zhiting, like many of his predecessors, treated Canton city as a juicy plum in its own right, a prize in which opium-related matters were managed by a specific structure, the Guangdongshenghe jinyan yaogao zhuanmaisuo (Central Medicinal Paste Monopoly of the Provincial Capital).<sup>116</sup> The prepared opium circuit was very closely regulated, and the press reports indicate a very high degree of surveillance over the opium houses in Canton, which were frequently inspected and raided by police.<sup>117</sup> In the mid-1930s, there were no fewer than three hundred people working for the Central Medicinal Paste Monopoly of the Provincial Capital.<sup>118</sup>

In all, the organization set up by Huo Zhiting seemed to be efficient. Chen Jitang was not the last to benefit from it because he drew substantially more money from opium than any of his predecessors. In the summer of 1936, immediately after Chen Jitang's downfall, the first officials that Nanjing sent to Canton were very much in favor of keeping Huo Zhiting in power, since the amounts on offer seemed to be more than what they could have gotten by exploiting the system themselves.<sup>119</sup> This would appear to be one of the clearest demonstrations that, in strictly financial terms and in a context where total bureaucratic control of opium management was a pipe dream, the leasing of the system to Huo Zhiting was obviously the best of all options.

The longevity of the opium system managed by Huo, such as it has been described here, can of course be explained by the duration of Chen Jitang's period of dominance. However, in ensuring a substantial and regular income for Chen, there can be no doubt that this efficient system in turn contributed to the relative longevity of his power.

### The Opium System in Canton, 1923–1936: A Time of Profound Change

Political control of the opium administration and of the farming system are issues that left imprints in the sources, visible and sufficiently deep to enable a year-by-year account of their development. This however proves to be an impossible task when we look at the actual workings of the opium circuits on the ground, especially because archives from the opium administration are totally lacking. However, if we look at the 1923–1936 period in its entirety, we can see two major developments. These stemmed from the desire of the authorities to achieve greater control over the opium

<sup>116</sup> *Guangdongsheng caizheng jishi*, 250; *YHB*, 8 October 1931; *XGR*, 17 June 1935; *Renjianshi*, no. 38, 20 October 1935, pp. 19–20; *GMR*, 17 March 1936. Curiously, in *Judu yuekan* 90 (June 1935): 2 and 8–9, this body is called the *shenghe teshuiju*—and this is the only such instance of it.

<sup>117</sup> On the control exerted over the Canton opium houses, see chapter 5.

<sup>118</sup> *Judu yuekan* 90 (June 1935): 8–9.

<sup>119</sup> *XGR*, 3 October 1936.

circuits. For the sake of clarity, it is useful to divide the opium circuit into two sections, one downstream and the other upstream, both relative to a central point constituted by the opium-boiling operation. Upstream, the authorities sought guaranteed and low-cost supplies of raw opium from the producing provinces. Downstream, they strove to regulate the sale and distribution of prepared opium in Canton as efficiently and as profitably as possible.

*Opium Diplomacy and the Search for Official Control over the Supply Side*

It was a constant that the Guangdong authorities strove to ensure the security of their raw opium supplies. The ideal solution would have been to buy raw opium in the producing provinces and convey it directly to Canton. A number of clues suggest that direct negotiations to this end did take place between the Yunnan and Guangdong governments, for example in 1928.<sup>120</sup> The fact however is that the authorities always made use of the big opium trading companies whose predominant position can be explained by the complexity of the tasks that they alone were capable of undertaking. They were capable of mobilizing large quantities of capital, organizing and negotiating the passage of opium convoys between different provinces, and finally ensuring their protection.<sup>121</sup> They were savvy in sufficient measure to involve and even incorporate the leaders of the producing, transit, and consuming provinces into their operations.<sup>122</sup> They knew how to become and remain indispensable partners. In their efforts to improve supply procurements, the Canton authorities therefore had no wish to dislodge the major trading companies.

Another concern throughout the period was that the main raw opium supplies passed through Guangxi, where the authorities would unflinchingly levy transit taxes. Now even if the Guangdong government obtained supplies through the trading companies, it could not have been pleased

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<sup>120</sup> FO 415, minute by superintendant of Exports and Imports, Hong Kong, 25 April 1928.

<sup>121</sup> Among the numerous sources describing the activities of these companies, see MAE, *Série Asie* 1930–40, *Sous-série affaires communes*, file no. 108, French Foreign Ministry delegation to Yunnan, information bulletins sent to the MAE on 3 March 1931, 8 April 1931, 8 January 1932.

<sup>122</sup> Chen Dayou, “Yijiuerliu zhi yijiusansi,” 121; Nantes, Pékin, *Série A*, file no. 157, report by the French Consulate in Nanning on 10 December 1932; Nantes, Pékin, *Série A*, file no. 158, report by the Consulate in Nanning, 13 June 1929. The major opium trading companies in Guangxi at the time are known from a series of firsthand accounts: see Cen Jianying, “Guangxi baise de Yanbang” [The opium companies of Baise in Guangxi], Zhao Yinting and Fan Zixi, “Sanshi niandai de Wuzhou yapien pifashang” [Opium wholesale traders in Wuzhou in the 1930s], and Zhao Yinting and Fan Zixi, “Wuzhou yapien yantu hangye shi” [History of the raw opium trading companies in Wuzhou], in Li Bingxin, *Jindai Zhongguo yandu xiezhen*, 591–592, 595–598, 599–607.

with the idea of its suppliers paying excessive duties since that would correspondingly constrain its own ability to deal with these companies. Relations with Guangxi Province therefore represented high stakes for the Canton authorities.

Starting in 1925, a year that saw the durable unification of Guangxi by the New Guangxi Clique, there were regular, ongoing government-to-government negotiations. While the interest of the Guangxi authorities clearly lay in maximizing opium levies at entry to the province, they also had to take into account that there existed alternative routes, albeit less convenient, to convey opium from Yunnan and Guizhou to their wealthy neighbor (not to mention the possibility of importing Persian opium),<sup>123</sup> and that it was not in their interest to kill the goose that was laying the golden eggs. It is an observed fact that in times when relations between Guangxi and Guangdong were bad (for example, during the disputes in 1934, as we shall see), Guangdong managed nevertheless to obtain its own supplies of opium through Hunan, paying the price of extending the supply route by two weeks. Thus, outstanding stocks accumulated in Guangxi, causing further difficulties for the Guangxi authorities,<sup>124</sup> who were no longer in a position to levy taxes on opium transit through Guangxi for any length of time at levels that Guangdong might find unbearable.

The already mentioned case of the Liangyue company is an example of a satisfactory understanding between the two provinces.<sup>125</sup> The agreement made in August 1932, and applicable as of 1 September of the following year, was another case of relatively complete collaboration: according to its terms, all raw opium consignments, whether from Yunnan or Guizhou, had to be registered at the Guangxi anti-opium bureau as soon as they entered the province, and then a tax of 50 cents per *liang* had to be paid to the Guangxi government.<sup>126</sup> Opium destined for sale in Guangxi itself was taxed at an additional 25 cents per *liang*. Consignments headed for Guangdong required permits from the Guangdong and Guangxi anti-opium bureaus for a fee of 50 cents per *liang*, which was then paid over to the Guangdong authorities. Delegates of the Guangdong Province Opium

<sup>123</sup> Fan Qiwu had already had recourse to this option in 1925: Slack, *Opium, State, and Society*, 74.

<sup>124</sup> FO 371/18198, report by the consul in Canton on the situation in Guangxi, 19 March 1934; Nantes, Pékin, Série A, file no. 158, report by the consul in Nanning, 28 February 1935.

<sup>125</sup> Huang Shaohong, "Xinguixi yu yapianyan" [The New Guangxi Clique and opium] in Li Bingxin, *Jindai Zhongguo yandu xiezhen*, 586.

<sup>126</sup> SDN/LON, file R3142, memorandum sur la situation actuelle en ce qui concerne le trafic de l'opium dans la province du Kwangtung [memorandum on the current situation of the opium traffic in Kwangtung], 25 April 1933, communiqué by the representative of Great Britain.

Suppression Bureau were present in the three main cities on the opium route through Guangxi: Nanning, Yulin, and Wuzhou.<sup>127</sup> Special vessels belonging to the Guangdong government arrived in Guangxi on specific dates to pick up the opium. The agreement also specified the ways in which Guangdong would share the costs of the fight against smuggling in Guangxi. This agreement meant that opium supplies from Guangxi were paid for in a way that was satisfactory to Guangdong. The difference between the opium taxes that were supposed to remain in Guangxi and those that were to go to Guangdong was small enough (75 and 100 cents, respectively) not to encourage the re-export of smuggled opium, for which the corresponding levies had been paid in Guangxi.<sup>128</sup> In 1934, for reasons that are unclear,<sup>129</sup> the Guangxi government unilaterally decided to stop levying the 25-cent surtax on re-exports and started turning a blind eye to smuggling. When Wen Zhongsheng became alarmed by the influx of illicit opium into Guangdong, he tried to negotiate a return to the 1932 agreements.<sup>130</sup> A new arrangement was made apparently at the end of 1934 or early 1935.<sup>131</sup> By June 1935, a jointly organized system for conveying opium was in place. It was quite similar to the one set up under the 1932 agreement and required raw opium convoys headed for Guangdong to converge on Nanning and Liuzhou, where import and transit taxes were paid on them. There, agents of the Guangdong Province Opium Suppression Bureau stamped the cases, and the opium was conveyed by the merchants up to Wuzhou. Its dispatch from Wuzhou to Canton was limited to two monthly consignments carried on a special vessel.<sup>132</sup>

All in all, Guangdong went through the 1923–1936 period without any major crisis of supplies. Opium diplomacy was facilitated by the fact that the two Guangs were fated to come to an understanding, since neither of these provinces actually had any interest in letting opium take routes other than through Guangxi.

<sup>127</sup> Huang Shaohong, “Xinguixi yu yapianyan” in Li Bingxin, *Jindai Zhongguo yandu xiezhen*, 585–586.

<sup>128</sup> FO 371/17169, report by the consul on opium in Canton, 4 May 1933; MAE, Série Asie 1930–40, Sous-série affaires communes, file no. 109, letter from the French consul in Longzhou and Nanning (Guangxi), 16 August 1933; XGR, 4 November 1934; SDN/LON, file R3142, memorandum concernant le trafic d’opium dans la province du Kwangtung [memorandum on the current situation as regards the opium traffic in Kwangtung], 25 April 1933, communiqué by the representative of Great Britain.

<sup>129</sup> The Guangxi authorities could well have been hoping thus to push for an advantageous renegotiation of the 1932 agreement on transit fees.

<sup>130</sup> XGR, 4 November 1934, 21 January 1935; *Canton Gazette*, 12 November 1934.

<sup>131</sup> *Judu yuekan* 95 (December 1935): 2; Levich, *The Kwangsi Way in Kuomintang China*, 243–244.

<sup>132</sup> XGR, 13 June 1935.



*The Development of Official Controls over the Distribution Circuits in Canton*

Official attempts to control the opium circuits upstream were paralleled by efforts to optimize the distribution of prepared opium by curbing fraud and collecting as much tax as possible. Canton was a special target where the focus was on permits and opium houses, two strategic levers in the opium circuits.

## Permits for Consumers

The first attempt by Sun Yat-sen's government to seal off the opium market for his own benefit included a measure to control smokers: all smokers had to register with the superintendent's office.<sup>133</sup> It is not known whether a system for controlling smokers by permits was actually set up. The superintendent's task was difficult enough at the time, and it can be supposed that all his efforts were concentrated on controlling the sales circuits, especially the circuits for conveying raw opium. The surveillance of smokers could not then have been a priority.

It was not until July 1925 that a real system of controlling consumption by permits emerged.<sup>134</sup> Every smoker had to register him- or herself, giving name, age, native place, sex, profession, address, amounts consumed daily, and the date on which he or she was planning to stop smoking. Smokers were theoretically required to give up their habit within a maximum period of four years, and the quantities of opium that they were allowed to buy (for home consumption) were to be reduced by a quarter every year. Three sorts of permits were delivered, the difference among them being only the quantities consumed per day: less than 3 *qian*, 3 to 6 *qian*, and more than 6 *qian* per day. The fees paid for permits were fairly low: respectively, 1, 5 and 10 yuan per year.<sup>135</sup> Above all, there was no question of discouraging smokers from registering. Rather, the measures sought only to make permit-holders feel threatened enough not to risk consuming anything other than opium from official sources. Despite the permits' low cost and compulsory nature, only 4,500 of them were delivered in Canton between August and November 1925.<sup>136</sup> This figure cannot be seen as a credible reflection of the total number of Cantonese smokers. It was only further proof of the flimsiness of the controls exerted by the authorities over opium consumption.

<sup>133</sup> FO 371/10337, report by the consul in Canton to the Embassy, 4 February 1924.

<sup>134</sup> National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), series no. 19, file no. 114, Regulations of 22 July 1925, partially reproduced in *GMR*, 23 July 1925.

<sup>135</sup> National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), series no. 19, file no. 114: Regulations of 22 July 1925.

<sup>136</sup> CWR, 21 November 1925, 287.



New regulations on smoking permits came into force on 16 October.<sup>137</sup> These purported to reserve permits for old and sick persons and for individuals who had become habitual smokers while living abroad.<sup>138</sup> The permits mentioned the daily quantities allowed to holders as well the dates on which they were supposed to stop smoking opium.<sup>139</sup> The system contained a novel and sophisticated arrangement: the four types of permits were now related to the places in which the smoker could smoke and the type or types of opium that he or she could smoke. Another innovation was a major increase in the fee as well as a difference among the fees: they now ranged from 10 to 100 yuan per month.

The philosophy underlying the permit system had now changed. Permits were no longer required for smoking in the Honam opium houses. The sharp increase in the amount of the fees reflects the fact that they were now designed to meet a very specific demand—that of luxury consumption at home.<sup>140</sup> There was one category of permit in particular (the *te-biezheng*) that allowed its holder and his smoking companions to consume any type of opium they wished at home and to be almost completely undisturbed by police checks, provided that they paid a very large monthly fee of 100 yuan.<sup>141</sup> The individuals whose needs were catered to by this category of permit were few and wealthy. They were people who wished to consume costly and theoretically prohibited varieties of opium (very often opium from the Hong Kong monopoly) at home and to do so in total security. Indeed, this was a period when the inspectors in charge of the suppression of illicit consumption tended to take a very close interest in wealthy smokers from whom they extorted large sums of money for personal gain.<sup>142</sup> These new permits protected these wealthy smokers from potential trouble.

The permit policy went through a major change in 1925 and 1926: the general control of consumption and (even less so) limits on consumption

<sup>137</sup> Ma Mozhen, *Zhongguo jindu shi ziliao*, 815–816.

<sup>138</sup> MAE, Série Asie 1918–29, Sous-série affaires communes, file no. 54, report dated 9 October 1929 by Lieutenant Laurin.

<sup>139</sup> However, the authorities apparently paid little attention to these stipulations. A used permit delivered in November 1926 and preserved in the archives of the French Foreign Ministry MAE, Série Asie 1918–29, Sous-série affaires communes, file no. 54, appendix to the report dated 9 October 1929 by Lieutenant Laurin, shows no entry in the section on daily consumption.

<sup>140</sup> Chen Dayou, “Yijiuierliu zhi yijiusansi,” 126; Guangzhoushi shizhengting, *Guangzhoushi shizhengting shehui diaochagu baogaoshu, shehui buliang shiye* [Report on bad customs by the social inquiry unit of the Canton municipal government] (Canton, 1927), 8.

<sup>141</sup> Copy of a permit from 1926, MAE, Série Asie 1918–29, Sous-série affaires communes, file no. 54, appendix to the report dated 9 October 1929 by Lieutenant Laurin.

<sup>142</sup> Chen Dayou, “Yijiuierliu zhi yijiusansi,” 126.

were no longer the major goal. The purpose of the permit was henceforth to tax consumption by wealthy persons at home and to obtain additional revenues.

The May 1929 regulations must be looked at more closely since they set up different categories of permits according to a pattern that saw no significant changes before 1936.<sup>143</sup> There were henceforth five categories of permits: those that allowed home consumption (subdivided into three subcategories), twenty-four-hour permits (which had appeared in 1927),<sup>144</sup> and, finally, the latest type of permit, known as *zhuanyongzheng*, which allowed consumption in smoking rooms and clubs in Hopei.<sup>145</sup>

*Tebiezheng* (exceptional permit): the smoker could smoke wherever he wished and whichever variety of opium he wished. Even if he was supposed to use official opium, he could in fact smoke smuggled opium without fear. Indeed, no checks were possible except with the express request of the Opium Suppression Bureau director in person. The permit had no photograph. On the other hand, the tax to be paid was huge: 100 yuan per month was high, even though the protection afforded by the permit was extended to all those who were smoking in the card-holder's company.

*Gaodengzheng* (first-class permit): the smoker could smoke only official opium, only at home, and accompanied by only one person. The amount of tax paid was 10 yuan per month.

*Putongzheng* (normal permit): the smoker had to smoke alone, at home, and could smoke official opium only. He paid 2 yuan per month and had his photo on the license.

*Zhuanyongzheng* (special permit): not for an individual but for an opium house or club that paid a fee of 5 yuan for ten days and per opium service. The Honam establishments were exempt from this requirement, and such permits were required only in Hopei, where opium houses and clubs had been allowed to reopen very recently. The term "special" (*zhuan*) probably comes from the fact that certain official documents described the Hopei opium houses as *zhuanshe fenxiaochu*, in the same way that the opium jars

<sup>143</sup> The May 1929 regulations on permits (Ma Mozhen, *Zhongguo jindu shi ziliao*, 917–918), remained practically unchanged in 1935 (XGR, 15 June 1935).

<sup>144</sup> *Huaxing sanribao*, 23 July 1927.

<sup>145</sup> This description of the permit system for opium smokers, valid for the 1929–1936 period, is based on the following documents: Nantes, Pékin, Série A, file no. 157, report by the French consul in Canton, 15 December 1932; regulation for permits, May 1929 (Ma Mozhen, *Zhongguo jindu shi ziliao*, 917–918); regulations on permits dated 23 July 1931: *Guangdong-sheng caizheng jishi*, 255–256; XGR, 15 and 17 June 1935; MAE, Série Asie 1918–29, Sous-série affaires communes, file no. 54, copy of a *zhuanyongzheng* type permit; CO 825/19/6, report by the consul in Canton, 16 August 1935; regulations on the opening of opium houses in Hopei: YHB, 7 February 1930.

intended for the Hopei opium houses were stamped with the seal “*zhuan-zi*,” as opposed to pots intended for Honam, which had the two characters “Henan.”<sup>146</sup> This was unequal treatment designed to limit the installation of opium houses in Hopei.<sup>147</sup>

*Linshizheng* (temporary permit): this type of permit was not for an individual but for one opium service for which the hotel, the restaurant, the brothel, or similar category of establishment, that is, one whose primary purpose was not opium consumption, paid a fee of 0.5 yuan for twenty-four hours. In the case of a hotel, a permit corresponded to a stay by a customer, but for other places, several persons could successively use the same permit and hence the same opium service for one twenty-four-hour period.<sup>148</sup>

Between 1929 and 1936 these rules were changed only in minor detail. The only significant innovation was the introduction in April 1934 of a booklet delivered with the permit.<sup>149</sup> Each time that a smoker made a purchase, the vending establishment had to record the date, type of opium, and amount purchased in the booklet and stamp it. The booklet had to be shown with the permit in the event of an inspection. This idea was to ascertain, at the end of the validity of the permit, that its holder was consuming at least the minimum quantity allowed. The quantities stipulated for a month at a time were 2 *liang* for a *putongzheng*, 5 for a *gaodengzheng*, and 6 for the *tebiezheng*.<sup>150</sup> For the latter two permits, the quantities were relatively high since a single smoker would consume on average about 3 *liang* per month. But it must borne in mind that the heaviest smokers took up to 0.8 *liang* per day. *Gaodeng* and *tebie* permits of course stipulated fairly high quotas when compared with average consumption, but they were meant to cover the card-holder’s smoking companions too.

A permit holder who had not purchased the full stipulated amount during the period of validity of his permit was required to make up the deficit before he could renew his permit. This requirement stemmed strictly from the same principle as that of the opium sale quotas for traders and retailers: the idea was to stop smokers from buying permits only in order to smoke smuggled opium. It was quite easy for an opium smoker to obtain supplies in the underground market and even put

<sup>146</sup> XGR, 14 June 1935; regulations on the opening of opium houses in Hopei: YHB, 7 February 1930.

<sup>147</sup> On the differences in the official attitudes to opium houses of Honam and Hopei, see chapter 4 on the geography of opium consumption.

<sup>148</sup> A specimen of this type of permit is reproduced in *Guangzhou zazhi* 23 (15 December 1933): 7.

<sup>149</sup> GMR, 10 April 1934.

<sup>150</sup> XGR, 15 and 17 June 1935.

illegal opium into jars of the opium monopoly to deceive unexpected inspectors. This system of quotas therefore limited the possibility of fraudulent activity to a marginal portion of the narcotic consumed by the permit holder. There is no other explanation of why the quota was relatively higher than the average consumption figures.

#### Controls over Opium Outlets and Opium Houses

Opium houses and opium outlets where customers went only to buy opium without consuming it on the spot were the second strategic point for controlling the flow of prepared opium. The respective importance of these places was inversely proportional to their place in the regulations. The fact is that the opium houses, unlike the outlets, were most often unmentioned and therefore nonexistent in the regulations. At times, their existence was entirely and explicitly illegal, as can be seen from article 14 of the 16 January 1924 regulations<sup>151</sup> and article 7 of part I of the 1 August 1925 regulations.<sup>152</sup> Certain rules do not mention any prohibition of opium houses, maintaining only an embarrassed silence over these places.<sup>153</sup> All in all, the regulations give the (false) impression that the retail trade was done only in the opium outlets.<sup>154</sup>

The opium outlets could be shops reserved exclusively for this purpose but, in most cases, vending opium was a complementary activity: opium could thus be purchased in currency exchange agencies, tobacconists, and even greengrocer or porcelain shops.<sup>155</sup> The opium outlets were fairly strictly regulated. They had to be duly registered and possess permits, of which they were three different categories (probably according to the quantities sold).<sup>156</sup> Each opium outlet had to pay a deposit (100 yuan according to the August 1925 regulations). The outlet's profit was set at 7 percent of the sales price of the opium.<sup>157</sup> In the mid-1930s, the retailer recorded each transaction in a special register subject to inspection by the

<sup>151</sup> Regulations reproduced in Ma Mozhen, *Zhongguo jindu shi ziliao*, 762–764; FO 371/10337, report by the consul in Canton to the Embassy, 4 February 1924.

<sup>152</sup> National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), regulations reproduced in Ma Mozhen, *Zhongguo jindu shi ziliao*, 802–804.

<sup>153</sup> Regulations of 28 October 1926, National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), series no. 19, file no. 113, reproduced in Ma Mozhen, *Zhongguo jindu shi ziliao*, 830–832.

<sup>154</sup> GMR, 12 March 1924; regulations of 1925 on retailers, reproduced in Ma Mozhen, *Zhongguo jindu shi ziliao*, 807–808.

<sup>155</sup> *Judu yuekan* 79 (ca. 1934): 30; 90 (June 1935): 4; 97 (February 1936): 20–21; YHB, 16 February 1930.

<sup>156</sup> Original copy of a permit for an outlet preserved in Sun Zhongshan Library, Wendelu Road, Canton, under reference T/F229.6/3.

<sup>157</sup> Regulations of August 1925 on retailers, reproduced in Ma Mozhen, *Zhongguo jindu shi ziliao*, 807.

opium monopoly. In this period also, he had to be vouched for by another trader.<sup>158</sup>

Despite appreciably greater visibility in the administrative documents, the position of the retailers was marginal compared with that of the opium houses, because they supplied opium exclusively for home consumption, itself a fairly small-scale phenomenon. The fact is that despite the silence and the prohibitions, the opium houses were tolerated uninterruptedly throughout the period. This was a concession to the consumers' preferred habit of smoking in groups, and in practice the authorities were quite reluctant to speak openly about these places, which had the drawback of making opium consumption far more visible than when it took place at home. While the opium houses are absent from the standard legal documents, they were fortunately of great interest to journalists and opponents of opium smoking, and this makes it possible to describe the place of the Canton opium houses in the official project to achieve total control over the distribution circuits.

Only a few details shall be given here about about how controls were reinforced over these opium houses.<sup>159</sup>

The 1923–1933 period is the one most difficult to describe. The opium houses at this time generally had three constraints: they had to pay a fixed monthly or quarterly fee, they had pay taxes in proportion to the number of opium sets that they made available to their customers,<sup>160</sup> and they were required to sell a daily minimum quantity of opium provided by the monopoly.<sup>161</sup>

After 1933, there can be hardly any doubt that political stabilization and the progress of the controls applied by Huo Zhiting considerably increased pressure on the opium houses. A new ruling in 1933 obliged the opium houses to sell opium only in sealed jars and ruled out any possibility of taking opium from already opened jars. This removed a vital freedom that had hitherto facilitated massive levels of fraud.<sup>162</sup>

However, the authorities themselves went so far as to set up shop in the opium house sector by opening fifteen "official" establishments (*gongying jiejianshi*) around 1933. These were actually opium houses that belonged to one Lin Laowei (at least some of them; things are not very clear on this

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<sup>158</sup> XGR, 17 June 1935.

<sup>159</sup> The taxation system and functioning of the opium houses will be described in detail in chapter 5.

<sup>160</sup> FO 415, report by the consul in Canton, 16 May 1930; *Judu yuekan* 92 (September 1935): 13, citing figures from the *caizhengting* for 1932.

<sup>161</sup> Thus, in 1924, the opium houses had to sell at least 5 *liang* per day depending on their category: SDN/LON, file R784, letter from the FO on the opium monopoly in Canton, 9 August 1924.

<sup>162</sup> YHB, 3 July and 20 August 1933. See chapter 5.

point), with whom an arrangement was made. This arrangement stipulated that the opium houses, which remained under Lin's management, enjoyed a number of privileges in exchange for which half of their profits went to the Guangdong Province Opium Suppression Bureau. It would be doubtless an exaggeration to call them public opium houses, since the Guangdong Province Opium Suppression Bureau reserved only a right of scrutiny over their management. Their privileges were that of boiling their opium themselves and selling foreign luxury opium such as that from the Indochina monopoly.<sup>163</sup> Apparently set up to break the resistance of the opium houses to the requirement of selling opium in sealed jars, these *gongying jieyanshi* were large establishments with costly equipment and were resolutely positioned in the luxury consumers' niche of the market. It was not surprising that the owners of the normal opium houses inevitably accused these establishments of unfair competition.<sup>164</sup>

As with permits for home consumption or consumption outside opium houses, the opium outlets and opium houses came under increasingly stringent control during the 1930s. At the same time this control made the system increasingly lucrative. However, the will to control consumption always came up against boundaries whenever it jeopardized revenues in itself by stimulating the growth of traffic in smuggled opium and of underground opium houses. This explains, for example, why the authorities never sought to limit the number of opium houses and, again, did not oblige the patrons of these places to take out permits.

### The Double-Edged Impact of Opium Revenues

While the efforts by the authorities to get the maximum amount of revenue from opium were successful, there was a high political cost to be paid for the legalization of the narcotic.

#### *The Impact on Government Revenue*

##### A Cautious Estimate

The revenues from opium were a matter of great interest to many people during this period. Magazines and journals frequently made estimates, generally set against the total amount of revenues in the province. These figures, while abundant, are almost always based on hearsay. The only exception is a series of annual opium receipts from 1926 to 1932, published in a report by Guangdong Province's finance ministry in 1933. This report claims to rely on the ministry's archives.<sup>165</sup> These estimates of course do

<sup>163</sup> XGR, 4 June 1934, 18 June 1935.

<sup>164</sup> YHB, 19 June 1935

<sup>165</sup> *Guangdongsheng caizheng jishi*, 252. These documents therefore cover a period when the province had just been unified under a single political authority.

not take account of various forms of embezzlement that took place before the final figures were established. We must allow for the proportion of these revenues that were siphoned off by the main warlords.<sup>166</sup>

Similarly, there is generally no indication as to whether the figures are for overall receipts or for net receipts, that is, receipts minus administrative costs. Still, this caveat can be set aside: these administrative costs were generally low because of extensive recourse to farming. Thus, in 1932, the costs of opium administration (related essentially to surveillance stations, anti-smuggling patrols, and to a lesser extent the administrative management of the Guangdong Province Opium Suppression Bureau) amounted to only 44,411 yuan per month.<sup>167</sup>

More importantly, even the figures for the revenues paid into the public coffers must be taken with caution. According to an article in the journal *Judu yuekan*, in 1935 the Guangdong government received opium monies from two different types of sources: one portion, paid into the *guoku* (revenue collected, in theory, on behalf of the national government), was indeed accounted for as opium revenue. However, there were other sources of revenue from opium. In particular, there were the transit taxes collected by a joint Guangdong/Guangxi body, the Xinan zuigao jiguan (Supreme Organization for the Southwestern Provinces), which then paid back large sums to the governments of the two provinces as subsidies. Through this sleight of hand, there are sums that do not appear in the books as opium revenues.<sup>168</sup>

A final note of caution: as is pointed out in the note on currencies herein, most of the estimates appear in the sources without any consistent indication as to the unit of account used—at times it is the “yuan” and at others the “dollar.” And it cannot be known whether it is central government currency or provincial currency that is being referred to.<sup>169</sup>

We need therefore to be extremely cautious in drawing any conclusions from the existing figures. In all honesty, all that can be reasonably hoped for as regards opium revenues in Guangdong are orders of magnitude and general trends in their progress. The temptation to quote every available figure will therefore be resisted and only consistent series and those trends that appear to be the most credible shall be kept.

<sup>166</sup> In 1933, the American journalist Wilbur Burton felt it would be impossible to obtain official data on the income that opium was providing for the military chiefs in the province: *CWR*, 8 July 1933, 234.

<sup>167</sup> *Guangdongsheng caizheng jishi*, 251.

<sup>168</sup> *Judu yuekan* 95 (December 1935): 2–4.

<sup>169</sup> This problem was not specific to opium revenues. In an article on the tax aspects of prostitution, Elizabeth Remick also notes that sources rarely specify the unit of account and emphasizes the usefulness of working on the basis of percentages: “Prostitution Taxes and Local State-Building in Republican China,” *Modern China* 29, no. 1 (January 2003): 65, n. 8.



Development of Opium Revenues and Their Share  
in the Income of the Province

The first series of figures on opium revenues and their share in the provincial budget upon the return of the Guomindang to Canton are monthly figures for the period October 1925 to June 1928.<sup>170</sup> In these thirty-two months, opium receipts amounted to an average of 3.5% of total receipts, a figure dragged downward by a very hesitant start from October to December 1925, with monthly receipts of the order of \$100,000. From July 1926 to June 1927, receipts rose to 5.3% with average monthly figures of \$555,000, then to 5.8% between July 1927 and June 1928 with the monthly average remaining stable. These figures show that in 1925 and 1926, the rise in opium receipts went together with a rise in the total amount of budget revenues resulting from the return of relative stability to Canton, Song Ziwen’s work on rationalizing the budget, and the extension of the area under Guomindang control. In terms of percentage, however, the share of opium remained modest as compared with total receipts and was in the range of 5%.<sup>171</sup>

Another somewhat later official source suggests that there was growth in the absolute value of annual opium receipts between 1926 and 1928:

<i>Year</i>	<i>Receipts (in yuan)</i>
1926	5,252,978
1927	6,720,000*
1928	7,416,000*
1929	7,409,664*
1930	7,764,013
1931	8,011,738
1932	8,662,025

Source: *Guangdongsheng caizheng jishi*, p. 257.

\* Receipts anticipated in the budget for the year concerned and not actual figures known after the fiscal year.

<sup>170</sup> Guangdong caizhengting zhujiju tongjike, *Guangdong caizhengting shiqi nianlai shouzhitongji tubiao* (Canton, 1928), n.p. For October 1925 to September 1926, this data is confirmed by another source: *Guomin zhengfu gongbao*, 1926, no. 51, cited by Lu Yangyuan and Fang Qingqiu, *Minguo shehui jingji shi* [Economic history of society in the Republican period] (Beijing: Zhongguo jingji chubanshe, 1991), 177.

<sup>171</sup> This estimate (a little over 5% for the year 1926) is confirmed by the *Judu yuekan* (23 [July 1928]: 47), which admittedly cites a Finance Ministry report.



The progression of these figures generally corresponds to the description given by contemporary witnesses who generally refer to a fact that we have seen: there was a rise in revenues under Song Ziwen followed by a temporary period of stability around 1928.

Whereas the general trend is therefore fairly well established, it would be a mistake, for the reasons already mentioned, to place excessive trust in the figures themselves. The fact is that they diverge considerably from estimates made by diplomatic sources. In 1929, a report by Lieutenant Laurin, commander of the French detachment in Canton, forwarded by the French consul in Canton, gave a figure of \$10,878,000 per year.<sup>172</sup> A report by the British consul in May 1930 mentions a figure of \$9,445,920 for 1929.<sup>173</sup> Even if these differences reflect differences between units of currency, this may well have been an example of the official underestimation of opium receipts.

There are no official figures available for the period under Chen Jitang. There are very frequent references for these years to the monthly figure of a million dollars that Huo Zhiting was supposed to be paying out for his lease, an estimate that appears to be plausible and points to a major increase in opium receipts over the earlier period.<sup>174</sup> However, it must not be thought that this sum represented the only opium-related income collected by the authorities. It would appear that they never shied away from very discreetly adding on supplementary taxes at different levels. Incidentally, we learn from the sources that the Canton police collected taxes for each lamp in the opium houses,<sup>175</sup> and again that surtaxes for road maintenance and education were collected on imported raw opium.<sup>176</sup>

An article in the *Judu yuekan* in December 1935, which stands out for its remarkably critical attitude toward the official figures and is a true piece

<sup>172</sup> MAE, Série Asie 1918–29, Sous-série affaires communes, file no. 54, report by Lieutenant Laurin, 9 October 1929. A Hong Kong newspaper reports annual revenues to the tune of 12 million (yuan) for the same period: *Huazi ribao*, 24 August 1936.

<sup>173</sup> FO 415, report by the consul in Canton, 16 May 1930.

<sup>174</sup> XGR, 28 June 1935; *Renjianshi* 38 (20 October 1935): 19; Wu Xiangheng, “Wo suo zhi-dao de Huo Zhiting,” 328; Chen Dayou, “Yijiuerliu zhi yijiusansi,” 130; Nantes, Pékin, Série A, file no. 157, report by the French consul in Canton, 15 December 1932; *Guangdongsheng caizheng jishi*, 250; SDN/LON, file R3142, memorandum sur la situation actuelle en ce qui concerne le trafic de l’opium dans la province du Kwangtung [Memorandum on the current situation as regards the opium traffic in Kwangtung], 25 April 1933; CO 825/19/6, report by the consul in Canton, 16 August 1935. A report in September 1936, however, gives the figure of \$900,000: Report to Jiang Jieshi, 15 September 1936, National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), series no. 41, file no. 519. This figure is similar to the one advanced by *Huazi ribao*, 24 August 1936. However, according to a report in the monthly information bulletin (dated July 1936) of the police in the Shanghai French Concession (Nantes, microfilm 2 mi 1939), Song Ziwen reportedly said that the opium revenues in Guangdong had touched 14 million dollars.

<sup>175</sup> XGR, 19 June 1935.

<sup>176</sup> *Judu yuekan* 92 (September 1935): 13.

of extensive investigative reporting, takes into account various accounting ploys and goes on to put forward the considerable figure of 38% of the total revenue of the province (\$24.7 million out of \$64.4 million). In all, it is quite difficult to situate opium revenues at a precise figure between the minimum of \$12,000,000 and this estimate of \$24,700,000 that appears to be somewhat exaggerated.<sup>177</sup> Be that as it may, under Chen Jitang, these estimated figures of opium revenues and their share in total receipts reached far higher levels than in the previous decade.

*The Broader Issues at Stake in Opium Revenues*

Opium Revenues Did Not Benefit Only the Provincial Finances

*Nanjing's Share* The first question concerns the distribution of opium revenues between the province and the national government. Opium revenues levied in the province did not necessarily benefit the provincial finances alone. As in every province, a share of the income (*guoku*, as opposed to *shengku*) was paid to the national government.<sup>178</sup> So long as the area controlled by the Guomindang was limited to all or a part of Guangdong Province, the question did not arise. But, it became crucial after the success of the Northern Expedition. Initially, opium receipts were allocated to the central government under an agreement with the provincial finance minister, Gu Yingfen, in mid-1927. In October 1928 however, Li Jishen and the finance minister at the time, Feng Zhuwan, unilaterally decided to keep the opium revenues for the province along with other income that hitherto had been paid to the central government. This state of affairs did not outlast Li Jishen's downfall a few months later and the Guomindang's subsequent resumption of control.<sup>179</sup>

It was only during the period of Chen Jitang's dominance that opium once again became a pillar of the provincial finances, with not a copper of the income derived from it going to Nanjing. In theory, opium appeared in all the accounts under the *guoku* heading, and its receipts were supposed to be paid as such to the central government. However, an accounting ploy was used whereby the provincial military expenses were posted in the column for *guoku* budget expenditure. Now, since this item of expenditure always exceeded the total amounts collected on behalf of

<sup>177</sup> Two other articles in the *Judu yuekan* assess opium revenues in 1934 at about 21% of total receipts, without giving any gross figures: *Judu yuekan* 90 (June 1935): 78; 92 (September 1935): 12.

<sup>178</sup> However, while agreements on sharing of tax revenues between the central government and the provinces had existed since 1928, the formal separation in the accounts between *guoku* and *shengku* began only in the fiscal year 1930–1931: Lin, "Building and Funding a Warlord Regime," 191; *Minguo ribao*, 2 March 1930.

<sup>179</sup> Fitzgerald, "Increased Disunity," 760–763.

the central government (including opium revenues as well as many other taxes), Guangdong Province freed itself of the obligation to send any money whatsoever to Nanjing. Ironically, the military effort that actually underpinned the province's independence was being financed by income that nominally should have gone to the central government.<sup>180</sup>

*Opium Income on the Guangdong Political Chessboard* The official figures by themselves tell us nothing about the financial impact of opium on the political life of Guangdong.

First, many important personalities obtained their share of opium-derived profits through bribes and various types of extortion that do not appear in the accounts. This was the case not only during the most troubled periods where we have seen that the warlords would directly collect taxes in the areas that they occupied. Thus, the French consul in Canton reported in September 1928 that the Liangyue company farmers who were paying out \$700,000 per month for their leases had to add a further "\$140,000 by way of gifts to senior and junior civil servants."<sup>181</sup> According to a British report in 1930, the raw opium transportation farmer was paying \$50,000 every month as protection money to the two divisions under Chen Mingshu. In addition, the farmers paid heavy "protection duties" to the military chiefs who controlled their districts. For the Jiangmen xian for example, these fees rose to \$10,000 per month.<sup>182</sup>

However, the most influential personalities in the province also made money out of the dividends that they collected by investing in the companies that took leases for portions of the circuit, especially the procurement of supplies from the interior provinces.<sup>183</sup> In January 1929, a 1,500-man convoy carrying 1 million *liang* (38 tonnes) of opium from Yunnan passed through Nanning. Of these million *liang*, 400,000 belonged to Long Yun (then the strongman of Yunnan Province), 400,000 to Chen Mingshu (one of whose officers was accompanying the convoy), and the remainder to the traders in Longzhou and Dongxing.<sup>184</sup> In 1931, Chen Jitang set up a transport company to convey a huge cargo of raw opium from Yunnan.

<sup>180</sup> *Judu yuekan* 80 (ca. 1934): 16; 95 (December 1935): 4. The question of the distribution of revenues and expenditure in the province between *shengku* and *guoku* under Chen Jitang is well described in Lin, "Building and Funding a Warlord Regime," 191–195.

<sup>181</sup> MAE, Série Asie 1918–29, Sous-série affaires communes, file no. 56, letter from the French consul in Canton, 20 September 1928, to the French chargé d'affaires in China. A report dated 29 August 1928 from the British consul in Canton to his embassy cites a figure of \$160,000 per month as protection money paid to the four armies (the 4th, 5th, 7th and 11th) of the province (FO 371/13252).

<sup>182</sup> FO 415, report from the consul in Canton, 16 May 1930.

<sup>183</sup> Chen Dayou, "Yijiuerliu zhi yijiusansi," 121.

<sup>184</sup> Nantes, Pékin, Série A, file no. 158, report from the Consulate in Nanning, 13 June 1929.

The capital for this company came from Chen himself, the traders who were part of the Opium Suppression Bureau, and other warlords in the province.<sup>185</sup>

It was also a matter of public notoriety that, at the beginning of the 1930s, certain highly paid and strategic posts such as that of the director of the anti-opium inspection bureau of Dongxing were given to major personalities in return for their support.<sup>186</sup> More generally, each local director's position in the opium administration as well as the inspectors' positions could bring in significant income that, through sundry abuses and extortion, could rise far beyond income from normal salaries.<sup>187</sup> Even these relatively secondary positions could not be obtained without major support.<sup>188</sup>

While these different flows are absent from the official accounts, they nonetheless played a major role since, through a clearly perceived community of interests, they helped the strongmen of Guangdong to bind the fragile threads of loyalties attached to their person.

#### The Political Cost of Opium

*The Weakening of Authority in the Face of Public Opinion* It should never be forgotten that the be-all and end-all of every political authority in Canton from 1924 to 1936 was the need to secure short-term survival. Chen Jiong-ming's example clearly shows that fine prohibitionist sentiments produced fearsome consequences in this area. In this context, all the criticisms of opium legalization as a means of increasing tax receipts seem to have been inconsequential.

Historians today, like diplomats at the time, are fond of pointing ironically to the abundance of successive projects that heralded an imminent elimination of the narcotic, in Canton as well as in the rest of the country. However, it must be noted that this proliferation was in itself full of significance: it was aimed at silencing, at least in the short term, all criticism of the evil effects of any policy to legalize opium. This clearly expresses the fact that the benefits that opium brought to the authorities in revenues implied a correspondingly huge disadvantage in terms of their legitimacy in the eyes of the population.

Every coin has its flip side, and cynicism on the subject of opium also came with a price. Alfred Lin has shown that even an autocrat like Chen Jitang whose power relied on military force could not ignore the claims and needs of the population in the interest of his own credibility. The

<sup>185</sup> *Minguo ribao*, 22 June 1931.

<sup>186</sup> *Minguo ribao*, 22 June 1931.

<sup>187</sup> *Renjianshi* 38 (20 October 1935): 19–20.

<sup>188</sup> Chen Dayou, "Yijiuierliu zhi yijiusansi," 118.

stability of his authority relied in part on social action toward the neediest sections.<sup>189</sup>

In the years 1924–1936, the anti-opium movement in Canton did not seem to be capable of wielding any great influence over public opinion. The Canton branch of the NAOA (National Anti-Opium Association) was founded on 18 September 1924 but nothing more was heard of it.<sup>190</sup> A list of the number of anti-opium societies throughout China in 1929 gives only one such society in Guangdong, whereas the province of Shanxi for example had 101, Jiangxi 39, Zhejiang 24, Anhui 36, and Fujian 14.<sup>191</sup> At the beginning of the 1930s, the national anti-opium commission set up in Nanjing received numerous letters from correspondents (often members of the NAOA) present in almost every province of China. These letters provided information on local conditions. Guangdong stands out by its absence from all this correspondence.<sup>192</sup> The fact is that it is difficult to explain this lethargy which contrasts so sharply with the enthusiasm that marked the empire's final years.

However, it should not be over hastily inferred here that the people of Canton were completely uninterested in collective action against opium. The demands for action came from other types of organizations that challenged the Guangdong government outright and demanded that it put an end to the opium trade. For example, in June 1925, the removal of Liu and Yang and the expulsion of their unwelcome troops emboldened the Canton Chamber of Commerce to call upon the government to immediately eliminate gambling and opium.<sup>193</sup> Somewhat at the same time, the students of Guangdong University founded an association against opium and gambling.<sup>194</sup> All these demands were echoed in early September 1928 in similar calls by the province's chambers of commerce.<sup>195</sup>

However, it was above all in 1935 that the debate became more significant in its scale. This was the year when the first Three-Year Plan came to an end in Guangdong.<sup>196</sup> The issue of opium policy was now raised

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<sup>189</sup> Lin, "Warlord, Social Welfare," 155–156, 192. The journal *Ren'ai* (Benevolence) especially reported Chen Jitang's charitable activities.

<sup>190</sup> GMR, 27 September 1924; *Canton Gazette*, 22 September 1924.

<sup>191</sup> *Opium, a World Problem*, January 1929, p. 27.

<sup>192</sup> *Jinyan gongbao* [Opium suppression gazette], vols. 1–12. The most zealous correspondents lived especially in the provinces of Fujian, Henan, Jili, and Zhejiang.

<sup>193</sup> GMR, 20 June 1925.

<sup>194</sup> GMR, 21 April 1935.

<sup>195</sup> *Guohuabao*, 14 September 1928, cited and translated in Aix, GGI 64936.

<sup>196</sup> Guangdong's first three-year plan had begun on 1 January 1933: cf. Ling Likun and Ling Kuangdong, *Chen Jitang zhuan* [Biography of Chen Jitang] (Canton: Huacheng chubanshe, 1998), 80–85. The plan set the goals and general guidelines of social, economic, and military policy in the province for three years.

with increased urgency as this was a time of reflection on the priorities to be defined for the second Three-Year Plan, which, it was hoped, would include the prohibition of opium.<sup>197</sup> The creation in 1935 of a women's anti-narcotic society (*funü judu tuan*) points to the existence in Canton of an atmosphere hostile to opium. This society, which was led by Zhang Huishi, had about a hundred members, mainly intellectuals. The society decided to carry out propaganda against opium, to visit opium houses to harangue smokers, to look for underground opium houses, to assist in detoxification activities, and to struggle against the presence of women serving opium (*yanhua*) in the opium houses. An interesting fact, which shows how the Canton elites were influenced by events in the capital, is that this society drew inspiration from an anti-narcotics youth society founded in Nanjing at the same time.<sup>198</sup>

Again, it would be a distortion to paint a picture of opposition between, on the one hand, cynical authorities concerned solely with taking as much profit as possible from opium and, on the other hand, public opinion putting pressure on the government to obtain a genuine policy of prohibition.<sup>199</sup> Matters were far less simple. The case of Canton shows that public opinion was mobilized in a somewhat listless fashion and that demands for a change in policy came also (and even above all) from official circles.

Thus, in March 1935, the Guangdong Province Senate (Guangdong canyihui) voted for a resolution asking the provincial government to eliminate opium, beginning with closing the Canton opium houses. Although the government then supposedly ordered the Opium Suppression Bureau to comply with this request, nothing happened.<sup>200</sup> The Guangdong Senate resumed its efforts in June by voting for a resolution asking the provincial government to tackle the problem of the opium houses.<sup>201</sup> Again some months later, at a meeting on 24 September 1935, it noted that the first Three-Year Plan that had programmed the elimination of opium was now drawing to a close without any tangible steps having been taken.<sup>202</sup> The senate drew on the new laws and watchwords of the central government's Six-Year Plan to propose a project to the provincial government, with four sets of regulations on gambling and opium. The proposed regulations, for example (clearly reflecting steps being taken by the Nanjing authorities at

<sup>197</sup> XGR, 28 June 1935; FO 371/20294, report from the consul in Canton on 30 October 1935 to the ambassador in Peking; *Judu yuekan* 95 (December 1935): 3.

<sup>198</sup> *Judu yuekan* 90 (June 1935): 8.

<sup>199</sup> This was the case of Zhu Qingbao, see *Yapian yu jindai Zhongguo*, 354–361.

<sup>200</sup> *Huazi ribao*, 12 March 1935; XGR, 12 and 26 March 1935.

<sup>201</sup> XGR, 9 June 1935.

<sup>202</sup> This was supposed to have happened in the third year of the plan: *Judu yuekan* 84 (January 1935): 24; 64 (ca. 1933): 13; *Renjianshi* 38 (20 October 1935): 21.

the same time), would set up geographical zones where opium would be prohibited and also stipulated a census of opium smokers.<sup>203</sup> Somewhat later in the year, a high-ranking military official put forward a plan to concentrate gambling and opium in specific sectors in the major district capitals and towns in the province so that they could be monitored more efficiently. This official who was obviously imbued with Confucian ideas believed that the plan would create salutary feelings of shame among those who went to the opium houses.<sup>204</sup>

In the first half of the 1930s Chen Jitang had held to the argument that it was impossible to do without tax receipts from opium, especially to finance operations against the Communists;<sup>205</sup> now in 1935, he responded to these increasing demands with a series of announcements. The first one in the spring of 1935 was a suppression plan. The only practical measure that came out of this announcement was a lottery to compensate for losses resulting from this suppression of opium which itself never came about.<sup>206</sup> However, the 3 June commemoration of the anniversary of Lin Zexu's destruction of British opium consignments proved to be an event in Canton big enough to demonstrate Chen's desire to be seen as a man determined to eliminate opium.<sup>207</sup> August and September 1935 also saw their share of announcements.<sup>208</sup> Then, at the end of 1935, Chen launched a new project that covered gambling too and was reported in an article in the *Judu yuekan*. This project was prepared together with the president of the provincial government, Lin Yungai, and its finance minister, Qu Fangpu. It proposed the very gradual elimination of opium. The years 1936 and 1939 were to be spent on taking a census of smokers, making an inquiry into the conditions of opium consumption, and finally preparing a plan based on these results. The years 1938 and 1939 were to be devoted to the gradual elimination of opium, which would become totally effective in 1940.<sup>209</sup> It is worth noting that the deadline announced for the total elimination of opium, 1940, corresponded precisely to the end of the Six-Year Plan set up by the Nanjing authorities. Chen Jitang was clearly trying to give the impression here that the opium question was being tackled with as much zeal in Guangdong as in the areas administered by the Nanjing authorities. However, the program as it was applied in the first two years

<sup>203</sup> *Judu yuekan* 93 (October 1935): 20–21.

<sup>204</sup> *XGR*, 3 December 1935.

<sup>205</sup> *Judu yuekan* 95 (December 1935): 3; *XGR*, 28 June 1935, 6 April 1936.

<sup>206</sup> *Judu yuekan* 90 (June 1935): 8.

<sup>207</sup> *Shenbao*, 8 June 1935; *Canton Gazette*, 4 June 1935.

<sup>208</sup> *Canton Gazette*, 26 August and 25 September 1935; *XGR*, 1, 5, 12, 16 and 24 September 1935.

<sup>209</sup> *Judu yuekan* 95 (December 1935): 20–22.



was not at all strict enough to suggest anything other than an attempt to gain time. Chen's projects for elimination that would be spread over the years up to 1940 left the supporters of abolition unsatisfied, especially as they came after a series of decisions whose application had not even begun. The annual report by the French consular medical unit in Canton for 1935 clearly summarizes the situation:

[The Canton authorities] regularly continue to display their firm intention to eliminate opium consumption. Five times in the year...steps to implement this elimination were decided upon and in each case were supposed to be applied immediately or in the shortest possible time. However, months have passed by without opium consumption being curbed in any way whatsoever.<sup>210</sup>

Chen Jitang, during his very last months as master of the province, made even bigger efforts to prove that the provincial authorities had been converted to the idea of gradually eliminating opium within a very short time, and made numerous declarations to this effect.<sup>211</sup> But even though on 16 March 1936 he replaced the man who had been at the head of the Opium Suppression Bureau, nothing happened.<sup>212</sup>

In all, the succession of plans announced by the authorities supports the view that these were signals to soothe public opinion but were backed by no serious commitment. For all that, the question remains as to whether the harmful consequences of Chen Jitang's opium policy were limited to this little game of political sleight of hand.

*A Weak Government against the Central Authority in Nanjing* Discrediting a political opponent by accusing him of being bound up with the opium trade was a well-known tactic in the political game of China in 1920s and 1930s. The various rival authorities often accused their political adversaries of practicing permissive policies toward opium. Thus, in July 1931, the pro-Nanjing press condemned the opium situation in Guangdong, which was then a hotbed of opposition to the central authority. The Canton government responded by condemning Nanjing's legalization of opium in equally vigorous terms.<sup>213</sup>

<sup>210</sup> Nantes, Pékin, Série A, file no. 195.

<sup>211</sup> *Canton Gazette*, 7 January 1936; *Ren'ai* 1, no. 11 (March 1936): 184. On this question, see also Deng Zhende, *Guangzhoushi weisheng xingzheng zhi jiantao* [Critical examination of the health and sanitation policy of the city of Canton] (Canton: Guangzhoushi zhengfu weishengju, 1935), 37–38.

<sup>212</sup> *GMR*, 17 March 1936.

<sup>213</sup> *Canton Gazette*, 29 June 1931, 14 July 1931; *Minguo ribao*, 27 July 1931; MAE, Série Asie



This exchange of rather hypocritical accusations shows that a government deriving profit from the opium circuits had little to fear by way of unfavorable political consequences so long as its rivals did the same. Everything changed when any one of them came up with a credible anti-opium policy. We have seen the extent to which in Guangdong in 1935, the proposals of the anti-opium groups were defined more or less in relation to policies adopted in Nanjing under the Six-Year Plan. This plan was clearly seen at this time as a benchmark in the anti-opium struggle.

It is clear that a strongman like Chen Jitang would view the central government's anti-opium activities as a threat to his legitimacy among the population. In 1934, when the Nanjing government started applying a credible though gradual policy to eradicate opium consumption, it could only win the sympathy of the Cantonese who were rooting for the elimination of opium. It is toward Nanjing that these progressive groups now looked. At least where opium policy was concerned, they now welcomed the return of their province into the fold of a political authority that seemed more attuned to their prohibitionist convictions. Jiang Jieshi's efforts, which drew praise from the League of Nations,<sup>214</sup> unquestionably reinforced Nanjing's position against Canton, both internationally and internally.<sup>215</sup> By presenting himself as a convinced partisan of opium elimination, Jiang Jieshi became a far better symbol than Chen Jitang of China's renewal and modernization, which, for every progressive group, required the eradication of opium. Jiang Jieshi, with his Six-Year Plan, for practical purposes forced the regions not under his influence to follow in his footsteps in order to avoid being discredited.<sup>216</sup> As for Chen Jitang, there was not enough time in which he could be forced to take real action. He was able right up to the end to put up a pretense by making announcements copied from the Six-Year Plan. All the same, it is not imprudent to suggest that the opium question contributed, to some extent, to the weakening of his personal power, which collapsed with amazing speed in July 1936.

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1930–40, Sous-série affaires communes, file no. 108, report by the French consul to the French Embassy on 11 July 1931.

<sup>214</sup> MAE, Série Asie 1930–40, Sous-série affaires communes, file no. 115, minutes of the twenty-second session (24 May–12 June 1937) of the consultative commission on the traffic in opium and other harmful drugs.

<sup>215</sup> On the use of the fight against narcotics as a means to reinforce Jiang Jieshi's power, see Paulès, "La lutte contre l'opium, panacée politique pour le Guomindang?," *Vingtième siècle* 95 (July–September 2007): 207–209.

<sup>216</sup> Yunnan and Guizhou too announced programs during the same period for gradually eliminating the drug within six and five years, respectively: *Judu yuekan* 90 (June 1935): 7–8; *Jinyan jinian tekan*, June 1935, cited in Ma Mozhen, *Zhongguo jindu shi ziliao*, 1081–1082.

From 1923 onward, the eradication of opium disappeared from the political agenda of the authorities that dominated Canton. The complexity of the changes at the helm of the opium administration reflects not only the frequency of political changes in Canton but also the importance of control over opium in the definition of an acceptable balance between factions within any government.

Behind these shifts and turns, which ended only with the coming to power of Chen Jitang in 1931, the opium administration lived with two models: farming out and maintaining direct official control. The formula devised by Song Ziwen in 1925 and 1926, which very extensively associated farmers with the different levels while imposing fairly stringent administrative controls, proved to be fairly long-lived because it brought about a significant increase in revenues.

The chief enemy of the systems set up from the mid-1920s onward was contraband opium. This explains the recourse to minimum quotas, constantly present and operating at several levels—from the merchants who took out leases on the transportation of raw opium, and the boiling and sale of the product in defined regions, up to the opium houses and opium outlets that retailed prepared opium. The quota system illustrates the impossibility of setting up total bureaucratic control and the choice of incorporating fraud to transform it into an engine. It also had the effect of inciting every link in the chain to sell as much opium as possible.

Although this is very difficult to quantify, it is clear that opium accounted for a major share of the revenues obtained by the authorities from 1925 onward, and even more so in the 1930s. The Northern Expedition was partly financed by opium. Chen Jitang, for his part, like other warlords, owed his independence to military power. However, in each and every case, the millions of dollars associated with opium constituted a double-edged sword because they contributed to discrediting the authorities.

This explains why opium policies were beset by a contradiction. The marked reticence over the opium houses is proof that the authorities wished to show themselves to be careful about the political consequences of opium's being seen in public places. However, the contradiction reaches a culminating point when we look at the anti-opium rhetoric that was mouthed by even those most interested in opium revenues. One cannot help thinking of the way in which Song Ziwen invoked Lin Zexu's memory in July 1925 in a preface to the laws setting up a rationalized monopoly of opium, or the sumptuous celebrations that Chen Jitang organized on 3 June 1935. Even when the official anti-opium propaganda was lukewarm or nonexistent, the newspapers and magazines were left free to unleash attacks on opium smoking and therefore indirectly criticize the policies applied in this sphere in Canton.

However, the authorities never went so far as to take action that could in any way reduce opium sales. On the supply side, the 1920 and 1930s were a time when prices returned to reasonable levels, consumers faced limited restrictions on smoking provided that they consumed officially distributed opium, and the system in place strove to maximize sales, making for a favorable environment that allowed opium consumption to return to the levels that it had enjoyed before the launch of the 1906 campaign.

## FOUR

# The Geography of Consumption

Nowhere are the contradictions of opium policy more sharply defined than in the relationship between opium and the urban space. The authorities constantly sought a compromise among their own interests, the smokers' needs, and the demands of anti-opium activists. An immediate ban on the opium houses was the topmost demand in the many anti-opium petitions made to Chen Jitang in 1935. In Canton as elsewhere, the conspicuous presence of opium consumption in the urban space became the subject of heated discussion whenever opium consumption was itself tolerated. The pages of the *Judu yuekan* and other sources hostile to opium show that opponents of the drug were extremely sensitive to the very profound impact of opium consumption on the city of Canton through the presence of its numerous opium houses. In their eyes, the illegitimacy of the practice was quite incompatible with its visible, even ostentatious position in the urban space.

What then were these places in which opium was smoked? The smokers had to be sheltered from the elements and needed a minimum amount of space to be able to recline and make use of the full panoply of instruments needed for the complex ritual of preparing an opium pipe.<sup>1</sup> All these reasons made it very inconvenient to smoke outdoors, and so opium consumption took place almost exclusively behind closed doors.

Any mention of the locales of opium consumption immediately brings to mind the "smoking den" or "opium house," that establishment devoted specifically and solely to this drug. However, not all places of opium consumption were opium houses. The practice of home consumption cannot be ignored, even though little is known about it from the available sources. Besides, there was a fairly wide range of public places such as brothels,

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<sup>1</sup> MAE, Série Asie 1918-29, Sous-série affaires communes, file no. 55, report by Doctor Jarland, "L'opium au Yunnan, ses conséquences sociales" [Opium in Yunnan and its social consequences], 25 October 1924.

gambling houses, hotels, and restaurants where opium was on offer as an additional service.

## The Places of Opium Consumption

### *Smoking at Home*

So scanty are the sources of information on home consumption that the subject must be seen as a "closed book." Still, some meager information can be gleaned from sparse and disparate sources and will serve for a summary report. The description that follows sketches out the place of home consumption in the life of the Cantonese smoker.

As for the scale of home consumption, various reports indicate that, in Canton in the 1890s, people would often serve opium to visitors in the same way they had served betel nut a few decades earlier.<sup>2</sup> If this was truly so, then it must mean that anyone and everyone could take opium at home.

These reports probably need to be tempered by the fact that they refer almost exclusively to upper categories of the population. However, there is a clear contrast with the Republican period. After 1912, this form of hospitality was no longer common. No source mentions it. The exception is an article (4) of a law promulgated in May 1912 that forbade people who held celebrations and parties from serving opium to their guests<sup>3</sup> (which was not quite the same thing as serving it to one and all in ordinary, day-to-day situations). Given the prolific anti-opium press and the large number of articles by readers of the *Yuehuabao* condemning the place taken up by opium in all its forms in the lives of their fellow citizens, it is difficult to imagine that the practice of offering opium to every visitor would go unmentioned had it been even moderately widespread.<sup>4</sup> This disappearance after 1912 of the practice of serving opium to guests is one of the more evident signs of the great changes that had taken place during the 1906–1912 period. The ubiquity of opium consumption that would be implied by the

<sup>2</sup> Royal Commission on Opium, *Report of the Royal Commission on Opium* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1894), vol. 5, pp. 224, 226. The Royal Commission on Opium was set up by the British Parliament in 1893 to look into the possibility of prohibiting the opium trade. The commission did not go to China but collected a considerable amount of testimony published in volume 5 of its huge report.

<sup>3</sup> FO 228/1846, *Jingchating yanding jinyan guize* [Police regulations on the suppression of opium], 8 May 1912 (published in the press).

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Jose Gaetano Soares, head of Macao's civilian hospital, interviewed by the Ekstrand Commission on 23 January 1930, had this to say: "When people host festivities or invite friends, they serve opium to show off their wealth. However the younger generation, those in their 20s, do not do this." He was, however, talking about the Portuguese territory: SDN/LON, file S197.

practice of offering the drug to every visitor no longer existed under the Republic: opium had become such an object of disapproval that it could no longer be part of a social ritual of welcome.

The excessive generalizations made by some historians claiming that, under the Republic, a guest would be offered opium as soon as he crossed his host's threshold in the same way he would be offered tea therefore need to be revised.<sup>5</sup> The routine offering of opium to guests perhaps did continue in regions most affected by opium consumption—those areas where the drug was produced and was available at very low cost. However, the example of Canton does not allow for any hasty conclusion that this was a common practice throughout China.

That said, home consumption did not completely disappear; only its scale needs to be reassessed. To begin with, there were periods when home consumption was necessarily predominant because the home was the only place where it was permitted to smoke opium. In the laws on opium consumption, for example during the 1907–1912 period, the right to smoke the drug at home was often the only right left in this sphere. This was not so much because it was more difficult to prohibit home consumption efficiently as because lawmakers saw it as a less scandalous practice since it remained restricted to the private sphere. Opium consumption at home was therefore tolerated as a stopgap measure on the road to gradual elimination. The removal of opium from the visible public space during this period, often seen especially in the Western sources as an example of hypocritical procrastination, seems on the contrary to have stemmed from an impulse to highlight the illicit nature of the practice.

Apart from these periods when the home was the last sanctuary of legal consumption, smokers did have a choice between smoking at home and smoking in a public place. There are possibly two distinct types of explanations as to why smokers might choose to consume opium at home. One was the wish among wealthy Cantonese, especially women, not to smoke in public places. The other explanation was related to the need, on the part of impecunious smokers, to limit costs by smoking illegal contraband opium at home.

#### Smoking at Home among the Wealthy

There are few reports on the material conditions in which opium was smoked at home. There are illustrations, but these are all from the end of the Qing period. They show men and women reclining on *luohan* set up in huge, richly decorated rooms that were clearly intended to receive

<sup>5</sup> Su Zhiliang, *Zhongguo dupin shi*, 282; Zhu Qingbao, *Yapian yu jindai Zhongguo*, 175.

guests.<sup>6</sup> The luxurious nature of the objects used as well as the fact that a part of the home was set aside for this purpose—something that could only be done in big houses—clearly shows the wealth of the dwellers. Japanese and British written sources also confirm the existence, at the very beginning of the Republican period, of rooms reserved for opium consumption.<sup>7</sup> Certain individuals would spend even more money by hiring assistants to prepare their opium at home.<sup>8</sup> Even if certain sources were inclined to indulge in sensational fantasies about wealthy Cantonese, it must still be assumed that home consumption in conditions of luxury was aimed at displaying the rank of the families.

Considerations such as these are not enough to explain why the wealthiest individuals preferred home consumption, as mentioned in the accounts of the period.<sup>9</sup> While keeping in mind that the same individual could smoke both at home and in public places, we must try to understand why, given the choice, some preferred to smoke opium at home.

One explanation is based on a theatrically presented example frequently employed by Chinese historians to illustrate the depraved nature of upper-class society in imperial and Republican times.<sup>10</sup> It appears that there were scions of wealthy families in whom a taste for opium would be deliberately inculcated so that they would stay at home and thus keep away from gambling houses and brothels. This type of tale is widespread in late-Qing literature. The practices in question most often led to the very result they were supposed to prevent, namely, family ruin.<sup>11</sup> The phenomenon was still observed under the Republic. That a man of Ma Yinchu's intellectual stature could describe this practice, before a national conference on opium in November 1928, and put it forward as an explanation for the scale of opium consumption in China suggests that the phenomenon is not to be underestimated.<sup>12</sup> The accounts of two persons who had lived in

<sup>6</sup> *Shishi huabao*, no. 17, August 1908, p. 6b; no. 21, September 1907, p. 10b; no. 18, November 1909, p. 5b; *Tuhua ribao*, no. 152, ca. 1909, p. 10; no. 341, ca. 1910, p. 7; *Dianshizhai huabao*, vol. 28, no. 12 (end of the 1880s), p. 89 (ills. 3, 4, 7).

<sup>7</sup> Ho, *Understanding Canton*, 115–116.

<sup>8</sup> YHB, 1 July 1930, 9 February 1931; see also the cases referred to by Luo Liming: *Tangxi huayue hen*, vol. 2, pp. 84–85, 253–254.

<sup>9</sup> *Judu yuekan* 47 (March 1931): 35; YHB, 1 July 1930, 9 February 1931; interview with Mr. Liu Ming of 5 October 2005.

<sup>10</sup> Su Zhiliang, *Zhongguo dupin shi*, 282; Zhu Qingbao, *Yapian yu jindai Zhongguo*, 171; Su Zhiliang, *Jindu quanshu*, 260.

<sup>11</sup> McMahon, "Opium and Sexuality," 135.

<sup>12</sup> Ma Yinchu, speech before the November 1928 conference, in *Zhongguo Guomindang zhongyan zhixing weiyuanhui xuanchuan buyin*, ed., *Jinyan xuanchuan huikan* [Collection of anti-opium propaganda] (Nanjing, 1928), 49–53.

Canton in the 1930s and were interviewed by Virgil Ho, as well as a report by Luo Liming, confirm its existence among very wealthy families in the 1920s and 1930s—families where the younger generations idled their time away and lived comfortably off joint inheritances. It was gambling, which could ruin the most solid fortune in a single night, that was seen as the primary threat, whereas the amounts that could be squandered on opium were necessarily limited.<sup>13</sup>

The case of young widows is similar. Here again opium was used as a means to keep a family member at home. A young widow's in-laws would give her opium to prevent her from entertaining any ideas of remarrying or even going out.<sup>14</sup>

This practice of cloistering individuals, in which opium consumption all told was essentially a means to an end, has drawn the attention of historians. However, the scale of the wealth that such practices implied can be imagined: they were possible only in very wealthy families, not only because of the expenditure on opium that they entailed but also because the family member concerned would become totally unproductive in economic terms.

The relative preference of wealthy people for home consumption remains to be explained. In addition to the considerations just mentioned (which might seem odd), the reluctance to visit public opium houses must be a plausible hypothesis. All the same, the widespread explanation according to which wealthy people were afraid of being robbed, attacked, or held for ransom in such places appears to be too simplistic.<sup>15</sup>

Thus Chen Dayou explains that, in the 1925–1936 period, wealthy Cantonese smokers hesitated to buy the permits needed for home consumption because these had to be renewed every month, and these permits would very conspicuously draw the avid attention of inspectors from the anti-opium bureau<sup>16</sup>—whereas, consumption in opium houses required no permit. Besides, while the wealthy were quite probably reluctant to visit lower-class opium houses, there did exist, as we shall see later, luxury establishments not only suited to their tastes and their idea of their own status but also catering specifically to their needs.<sup>17</sup> A more likely explanation of the preference for home consumption lies in its practical

<sup>13</sup> *Wuxian manhua* 3, no. 3 (18 January 1931): 5; Luo Liming, *Tangxi huayue hen*, 2:83, 251.

<sup>14</sup> Hu Hanmin, speech during the November 1928 conference, in *Zhongguo Guomindang zhongyan zhixing weiyuanhui xuanchuan buyin*, *Jinyan xuanchuan huikan*, 24.

<sup>15</sup> Zhu Qingbao, *Yapian yu jindai Zhongguo*, 99. We will see in chapter 5 that the opium houses were not generally the dangerous places that they were often depicted as.

<sup>16</sup> Chen Dayou, "Yijiuerliu zhi yijiusansi," 126.

<sup>17</sup> For example, the famed, opulent Lingnan establishment at the beginning of the 1930s, referred to in GMR, 27 July 1931; YHB, 12 June 1931, 5 August 1931.



advantages—one could smoke at home whenever one so wished—as well as the shame that some might have felt about publicly disclosing their partiality to opium.<sup>18</sup> Women typically fell into this category: for a woman, to visit opium houses and more generally any place of public entertainment incurred social disapproval (which itself could lead to outright prohibition).<sup>19</sup>

We have seen that, from the mid-1920s onward, the authorities issued special permits for home consumption. Unfortunately, there is only one reference in the sources to the number of permits issued, a figure that could have given an idea of the scale of licit home consumption. This reference is in a report dated October 1929 by Lieutenant Laurin, commander of the French detachment in Canton.<sup>20</sup> Laurin cites 1,700 permits issued for home consumption, this at a time when the high price of these permits meant that they were taken only by wealthy individuals. If we go by this figure, home consumption by wealthy smokers was a minor activity.

While prudence dictates that there could have been a multitude of explanatory factors, it can be assumed that home consumption by wealthy individuals under the Republic stemmed from two opposite motives, one of which gradually replaced the other. The first motive, a vestige of the previous century, was to show the social status of the family through opium consumption in their luxurious home. The second motive was the discretion, and even total secrecy, that attended home consumption.

#### Home Consumption among Other Social Groups

Less-wealthy smokers had good reason in the 1920–1930 period not to consume opium at home. Not only did the permits for smoking at home entail an extra cost, but it was not easy to find the right equipment and the necessary space.<sup>21</sup> Of course, it could be said that anyone with enough space at home to lie down and go to sleep could have also used this space to smoke opium. However, as we shall see in chapter 6, opium smokers generally preferred to smoke with friends, and that required more space. And the opium houses had considerable attractions of their own.

<sup>18</sup> This is the reason given by Chen Dayou to explain why, despite the cost and other inconvenience of smoking at home, certain smokers still preferred to do so: “Yijiuierliu zhi yijiusansi,” 126.

<sup>19</sup> After March 1932, women were prohibited from dwelling in the Canton opium houses (see chapter 5).

<sup>20</sup> MAE, Série Asie 1918–29, Sous-série affaires communes, file no. 54, report dated 9 October 1929.

<sup>21</sup> A 1907 report mentions the hardships of the poorer Cantonese smokers who were forced to buy the equipment needed for home consumption after the closure of the opium houses: Aix, GGI 43019, report by Rozier, “Étude sur la question de l’opium en Extrême Orient,” 32.

The press does occasionally mention illicit opium smoking at home. However, the reports are not very detailed. It would seem that the smokers were generally Cantonese who smoked contraband opium at home because they were far too poor to smoke official opium or even *yantiao* in the opium houses.<sup>22</sup>

An interesting study conducted among the Tanka population in the mid-1930s suggests that the poorest in this community would smoke at night on their boats using makeshift equipment because that cost less than going to a opium house. This equipment cost very little and amounted to no great loss if confiscated. Smoking at home also allowed the smoker to collect the residue of his own consumption and use it again. Tanka smokers with a little more money preferred to go to opium houses on land.<sup>23</sup>

The sources also report several instances of opium smoking in the Guangxi Guild lodge, which housed natives of this province, probably newly arrived, impecunious migrants. Disregarding regulations to the contrary in this lodge, the smokers would get together in the evenings in small groups of up to ten. Thus, smoking at home, even when it was illegal, was not necessarily a solitary affair.<sup>24</sup> The attraction of smoking in groups is confirmed in the case of a lodge for Yunnan natives where several smokers were caught in the company of unlicensed prostitutes and arrested.<sup>25</sup> The smokers in the lodges would share their smoking apparatus: in one case where about ten smokers were caught by surprise, they were found sharing only two lamps and two pipes. Pooling resources was one way to cope with the high cost of the smoking apparatus.<sup>26</sup> The examples of the Tankas and the dormitories point to two ways of getting around the obstacle of costs, which were not necessarily prohibitive in the case of clandestine home consumption.

The economic argument offers a fairly good explanation as to why the poorest sections preferred to smoke at home. But it does not explain why some members of the middle classes who could have afforded to go to opium houses did not do so. In all likelihood, as with the wealthier smokers, it was for reasons of discretion. The number of women from this class

<sup>22</sup> YHB, 6 September 1930, 30 October and 27 December 1931, 1 March 1932.

<sup>23</sup> Wu Ruilin, "Sanshui hekou Danmin diaocha baogao" [Report on the Tankas of the Mouth of the Three Rivers], *Lingnan xuebao* [Lingnan journal] 5, no. 2 (August 1936): 48.

<sup>24</sup> Guangzhou Guangxi huiguan, *Guangzhou Guangxi huiguan ershisi nianfen guanwu zongbao gaoshu* [Guangxi Natives Mutual Aid Society in Canton: Annual activity report for 1935] (Canton, 1936), 16–18: minutes of the meeting on 22 September 1935.

<sup>25</sup> YHB, 9 December 1934.

<sup>26</sup> Guangzhou Guangxi huiguan, *Guangzhou Guangxi huiguan ershisi nianfen*, 16–18.

caught smoking illegally at home suggests that this type of motive was prevalent.<sup>27</sup>

### *Public Locales*

These were establishments which, unlike opium houses, were not primarily intended for opium consumption but where customers could use opium in certain instances. We have seen that, from 1927 onward, there was only one type of permit for these places. The regulations of May 1929 provided for temporary twenty-four-hour permits for brothels, hotels, and restaurants.<sup>28</sup> Opium consumption in these places was illegal without permits.<sup>29</sup>

### *Hotels*

Under the late empire, opium consumption had been prohibited in hotels as in other public places in 1907, but the possibility of smoking openly in the hotels of Canton is attested to in 1923 and 1924.<sup>30</sup> Thereafter, up to 1936, one could smoke opium in a hotel room but alone.<sup>31</sup> Travelers passing through the city, as in the case of one Mr. Wu traveling to Canton in 1933, could apply for a special twenty-four-hour permit.<sup>32</sup> The permit stated the exact time at which the twenty-four-hour period began. Both news reports and articles in anti-opium magazines indicate that opium consumption in hotels was fairly widespread in the 1930s.<sup>33</sup> Illegal consumption was also frequently associated with visits by prostitutes.<sup>34</sup>

### *Teahouses*

Teahouses were central to Cantonese social life. Customers could sit in these teahouses for a trivial cost to play chess, read newspapers, discuss business, or quite simply relax with friends.<sup>35</sup> The practice of taking opium

<sup>27</sup> *YHB*, 18 and 23 October 1930, 5 June and 16 August 1931.

<sup>28</sup> *GMR*, 10 May 1929.

<sup>29</sup> *YHB*, 12 December 1931.

<sup>30</sup> Ye Shaohua, "Guangdong jinyan quanli," 112; regulations published in *GMR*, 28 February 1924.

<sup>31</sup> Article 17 of the police regulations for hotels dated 14 June 1933, reproduced in *YHB* dated 19 June 1933; FO 415, report by the consul-general in Canton, 16 May 1930; May 1929 regulations: *GMR*, 10 May 1929.

<sup>32</sup> *Guangzhou zazhi*, no. 23, 15 December 1933, p. 7.

<sup>33</sup> *Judu yuekan* 90 (June 1935): 4; *YHB*, 1 October and 15 November 1933.

<sup>34</sup> *Judu yuekan* 42 (August 1930): 35; *YHB*, 10 May and 25 June 1930, 13 January 1932.

<sup>35</sup> Muramatsu Shōfū, *Nankani asobite* [Travels through South China] (Tokyo: Ōsaka yago-shoten, 1931), 55–60; "Guangdong de chaguan" [The teahouses of Guangdong], *Renjianshi* 33 (5 August 1935): 30–32.

in teahouses had been known in imperial times before 1907.<sup>36</sup> However, for the Republican period I have found only one report from 1924.<sup>37</sup> There is no mention thereafter of the practice, either in the regulations on twenty-four-hour permits or in news items or articles about teahouses.<sup>38</sup> This suggests that opium was no longer smoked in these places.

#### Restaurants

In imperial times, opium could be smoked in restaurants—as in hotels and teahouses—but this facility disappeared with the 1906 edicts.<sup>39</sup> However, unlike in teahouses, smoking in restaurants returned in 1915 with Long Jiguang's policy of legalized opium sales.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, in the years that followed Chen Jiongming's downfall, restaurants could offer customers the possibility of smoking opium.<sup>41</sup> The May 1921 regulations stipulated that temporary twenty-four-hour permits allowed consumption in restaurants; the *wenshi ziliao* also mentioned this possibility.<sup>42</sup> However, information on the scale of this practice is scarce. There is no mention of it in various newspaper reports. Opium consumption probably required too much space in the smaller establishments. Besides, the authors of the *wenshi ziliao* referring to opium consumption in restaurants use the term *jiulou*, designating upper-class restaurants. We know that the opium smokers in the luxury restaurants of the Chentang District, which specialized in banquets where renowned courtesans (*huayan jiuja*) would be present, could take opium in an ambience of refinement.<sup>43</sup> However, restaurants

<sup>36</sup> Aix, GGI 43002, 1907 report by Hardouin citing a report by the French Consulate in Canton, 6 August 1907; Aix, GGI 43019, report by Rozier, "Étude sur la question de l'opium," 31; Royal Commission on Opium, *Report*, 224.

<sup>37</sup> Regulations published in *GMR*, 28 February 1924.

<sup>38</sup> There is no mention of opium consumption in the detailed and precise list of the very numerous activities possible in the teahouses of Canton in "Guangdong de chaguan." Nor is there any mention of opium in the following: "Ji Guangzhou Chengzhu chalou" [Memories of the Chengzhu teahouse in Canton], in *Guangdong fengqing lu*; Guangzhoushi zhengfu, *Guangzhou zhinan* [Guide to Canton] (Canton: Guangzhoushi zhengfu, 1934), 156; Muramatsu Shōfū, *Nankani asobite*, 55–60.

<sup>39</sup> *Shina* 4 (1913): 17a; Aix, GGI 43002, report by Hardouin of 1907; Aix, GGI 43019, report by Rozier, 12 October 1907, 31; MAE, Nouvelle série, Sous-série Chine, file no. 690, memorandum on opium for presentation to the International Opium Commission assembled at Shanghai, February 1909 (Shanghai: Statistical Department of the Inspectorate General of Customs), 43.

<sup>40</sup> *Nanyuebao*, 4 November 1915.

<sup>41</sup> Regulations published in *GMR*, 28 February 1924.

<sup>42</sup> Chen Dayou, "Yijiuierliu zhi yijiusansi," 123, 126; Ye Shaohua, "Guangdong jinyan quanli," 112.

<sup>43</sup> Cun Shi (pseudonym), "Yanhua xueleihua Chentang," 268–270.

of this type were actually a sort of extension of the world of brothels with which they lived in symbiosis.

### Brothels

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, opium, earlier known only for its medicinal virtues, purportedly had a place in sexual dalliance at the Ming court.<sup>44</sup> Logically, therefore, it was the brothel that initially was the preferred public place for the consumption of the narcotic—well before the opium house, which itself appeared only in the nineteenth century. Thus, from the very end of the Ming period onward, opium was being consumed in the brothels of Canton.<sup>45</sup> In Republican China, the indisputably important role of opium consumption in the daily life of the brothels has already been emphasized by historians of prostitution, as it has been by students of the opium question.<sup>46</sup> In Canton, as elsewhere, the brothels offered their customers opium and the necessary apparatus for it. Smoking was fully legal provided that the customer had purchased a twenty-four-hour permit.<sup>47</sup> The artistic works of the period, in this case exclusively from the end of the empire, confirm the presence in upper-class brothels of the opium smoker's paraphernalia: luxury *luohan* with all the apparatus laid out in a pleasantly furnished room (plate 8).<sup>48</sup>

Beliefs about certain properties of opium, which justified its use in brothels, were quite deeply entrenched in Republican times, and this helps explain its popularity: in a 1935 survey by a journalist on the reasons why people smoked opium, one of the three factors given by Canton smokers was that opium helped prolong sexual pleasure.<sup>49</sup> However, opium was not just a substance used to enhance the customer's appreciation of the prostitute's wares. It played a far deeper and subtler role in the life of the brothels. From an analysis of contemporary literary works, Keith McMahon has brilliantly shown how, at the end of the Qing period, certain

<sup>44</sup> Zheng, *The Social Life of Opium in China*, 11–22.

<sup>45</sup> Ho, *Understanding Canton*, 106–107. For a firsthand report on the presence of opium in the flower boats of Canton in the mid-nineteenth century, see Yvan Melchior, *Inside Canton* (London: Henry Vizetelly, 1858), 167.

<sup>46</sup> Slack, *Opium, State, and Society*, 49; Ma Mozhen, *Dupin zai Zhongguo*, 72–73; Alexander Des Forges, "Opium/Leisure/Shanghai: Urban Economies of Consumption," in Brook, *Opium Regimes*, 170; Christian Henriot, *Prostitution and Sexuality in Shanghai: A Social History, 1849–1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 243.

<sup>47</sup> *Judu yuekan* 90 (June 1935): 4; Liu Fujing, *Jiu Guangdong yanduchang*, 139; regulations published in *GMR*, 28 February 1924; *YHB*, 12 December 1931.

<sup>48</sup> *Shishi huabao*, January 1908, p. 3a.

<sup>49</sup> *XGR*, 20 June 1935.

habitués of the brothels saw opium as a spice to enhance a relationship with a prostitute.<sup>50</sup>

Opium must therefore be considered as an element extensively integrated into the social life, codes of conduct, and circulation of money in the brothels. This could be seen, for example, in the afternoon courtesy visits (*dashuiwei*) by customers, when a habitué would introduce a new “suitor” to a prostitute. On this occasion, the various parties would smoke British cigarettes or opium, or take tea or fruit, according to their tastes. In other circumstances, opium helped customers cope with disappointment (and save face). Thus, a customer waiting while a prostitute was with another customer could, if he wished, wait in another room and while away his time smoking opium alone or in the company of other visitors. The prostitute in question would then appear briefly and greet him. On occasion, the prostitutes would themselves prepare the opium pellets that they would then smoke together with their habitual customers.<sup>51</sup>

The high-class brothels and their staff earned extra income from the opium that they sold to their customers at a profit. Besides, the staff would recover the dross for their own use and receive tips from customers. This way of indirectly remunerating the brothel-keepers and staff also explains the frequency of opium consumption in brothels. The point to be noted is that this practice was in no way limited to the luxury establishments.<sup>52</sup>

### Gambling Parlors

Opium consumption in the gambling parlors is far more difficult to study than its equivalent in the brothels.<sup>53</sup> There is a paucity of studies on this type of establishment (and more generally on gambling itself). Also, the sources are silent. There are reasons why the gambling houses could actually have been less concerned: gambling fever diminished the attractiveness of opium. Again, unlike visits to a prostitute, gambling itself is not easy to combine with opium consumption.

However, the gambling houses, especially the luxury establishments, were governed by one golden rule: they would do everything possible to please the customers and make them stay as long as possible. This is why

<sup>50</sup> Keith McMahon, “Opium and Cexuality,” 147. As depicted also in the erotic motifs on certain smoking utensils used in the brothels in the late-Qing period: John Byron, *Portrait of a Chinese Paradise: Erotica and Sexual Customs of the Late Qing Period* (London: Quartet Books, 1987), 72–74.

<sup>51</sup> Luo Liming, *Tangxi huayue hen*, 1:21–22, 69, 2:251; Cun Shi, “Yanhua xueyan hua Chentang,” 293.

<sup>52</sup> As indicated in an article on lower-category prostitutes: *Guangzhou zazhi* 33 (1 December 1934): 8–9.

<sup>53</sup> Ma Mozhen, *Dupin zai Zhongguo*, 72–73.

certain gambling houses allowed people to eat and drink on the premises as well as smoke opium.<sup>54</sup>

Oddly, gambling houses are not among the places designated for the temporary twenty-four-hour permits in the May 1929 regulations.<sup>55</sup> This absence is difficult to explain. It may well be that the use of opium in these places was governed by a special regulation of which no trace remains. It is unlikely that opium was very extensively present in the gambling houses.

### *Julebu*

This Chinese word derived from the English “club” nevertheless covered a distinct reality quite different from that of the London clubs of the same era, and does not lend itself to a precise definition. Cross-comparisons of the different sources suggest that a *julebu* in Canton was something of a luxury establishment where customers could gamble, smoke opium, eat and drink, and also perhaps visit prostitutes. The difference between the clubs and the upper-class brothels, which, all in all, offered the same services, seems to be that the various activities were distributed among the different floors of a same building and also that the rules of entry were somewhat different. In Canton, although there were not a great many of these clubs, they continued to exist right through the period under study. They seem to have been situated mainly in the Xiguan District (which corresponds to the Taiping, Chentang, and Baohua Districts: see map 5).<sup>56</sup>

Ye Shaohua cites the case of the Dongan Gongsì club in the 1923–1925 period. This *julebu* offered the services of a brothel, opium house, gambling house, and restaurant all rolled into one. It served the senior officers of the different armies then stationed in Canton. These military chiefs needed to avoid traveling from restaurants to brothels not only for their own comfort but also, it would seem, for their safety. The third floor of the building was devoted to prostitution and opium consumption and the second floor to gambling, while the first floor received the servants of their escorts.<sup>57</sup>

The May 1929 regulations put the *julebu* in the same category as the opium houses (as opposed to the brothels, restaurants, and hotels). It is

<sup>54</sup> *Judu yuekan* 91 (August 1935): 19–21; *Minguo ribao*, 27 July 1931; *Huazi ribao*, 10 April 1930.

<sup>55</sup> *GMR*, 10 May 1929.

<sup>56</sup> *Huaguobao*, 9 April 1915; Ye Shaohua, “Guangdong jinyan quanli,” 113; *XGR*, 22 September 1935; *YHB*, 27 May 1930, 12 June 1932.

<sup>57</sup> Ye Shaohua, “Guangdong jinyan quanli,” 113. As it happens, there was a special link between opium and prostitution: in the division of floors among pleasures, opium cohabited with prostitution, not with gambling.



therefore unimaginable that the *julebu* would not have been able to offer opium to their customers.<sup>58</sup>

Strikingly, consumption in public places other than opium houses is rarely mentioned in the press and in articles in the *Judu yuekan* on Canton. Opium probably did not occupy a major position in public places. The idea that opium had infiltrated every part of the city is not the dominant theme in the scandalous reports of opponents of the drug who focused their attacks specifically on the influence of the opium houses.

Also, it would seem that opium was somewhat in retreat under the Republic as compared with before 1906. As in the restaurants and teahouses, opium did not return to all the places it had occupied earlier. The presence of opium in public places was henceforth limited above all to brothels and *julebu* (setting aside the case of hotels since a hotel room cannot properly speaking be called a public place), places not entirely on the fringes but still not as innocent as a restaurant or a teahouse. In terms of a presence in Canton's public places, therefore, not only did opium clearly lose ground as compared with the end of the empire but it became more than ever distinctly associated with the other so-called vices of gambling and prostitution.

### Opium Houses: A Complex and Constantly Evolving Urban Geography

The opium house, the only venue specifically dedicated to opium consumption, was the spatial expression par excellence of the presence of the narcotic in the city of Canton. The detractors of opium incessantly waxed indignant about the massive presence of opium houses in the city. How closely did their indignation reflect reality? Is it possible to make a reliable estimate of the number of opium houses in Canton?

#### *The Numbers*

Not all the places where opium was smoked were opium houses, and, as we shall see in the next chapter, smoking opium was not the only activity carried out in an opium house. The following definition will therefore serve: an opium house was a place that received customers who consumed opium therein, this activity being the very reason for its existence. Unfortunately, any estimate of the number of opium houses in Canton must depend on figures provided by sources that were not strictly rigorous with their terminology. Some of these sources very probably made no distinction between opium houses and simple opium outlets. Another problem

<sup>58</sup> Regulations of May 1929: Ma Mozhen, *Zhongguo jindushi ziliao*, 917–918.



is that of the geographical area to which the estimates correspond. It is not clear whether they cover the municipal territories as understood administratively or all urbanized areas, or again whether they included also suburban areas, which, we shall see, contained many such establishments. Finally, we do not know whether the clandestine opium houses were also accounted for in these figures.

With these reservations in mind, let us look at the following table, which gives the estimated numbers of opium houses collected for the period under study. Some of these figures were very probably copied from source to source, and data in this category are indicated by asterisks.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Observations</i>
October 1907	800	diplomatic <sup>59</sup>	
May 1923	100	press <sup>60</sup>	
January 1924	500	customs <sup>61</sup>	*
Early 1924	500	diplomatic <sup>62</sup>	*
August 1924	500	diplomatic <sup>63</sup>	citing the Canton press
August 1924	800	CWR <sup>64</sup>	
1927	255	municipality <sup>65</sup>	Honam opium houses with permits
1927	1,000	CYB <sup>66</sup>	registered opium houses
September 1928	160	diplomatic <sup>67</sup>	*
1929	140	NAOA <sup>68</sup>	

(continued)

<sup>59</sup> Aix, GGI 43019, report by Rozier, "Etude sur la question de l'opium en Extrême Orient."

<sup>60</sup> *Shenbao*, 23 May 1923.

<sup>61</sup> National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), series no. 679 (Maritime Customs), file no. 14220, "Canton district occurrences January 1924–July 1924," report dated 19 January 1924.

<sup>62</sup> MAE, Série Asie 1918–29, Sous-série affaires communes, file no. 55.

<sup>63</sup> SDN/LON, file R784, letter from the FO to the SDN/LON on 9 August 1924.

<sup>64</sup> CWR, 2 August 1924, p. 312.

<sup>65</sup> Guangzhoushi shizhengting, *Guangzhoushi shizhengting shehui diaocha gubao*, 8.

<sup>66</sup> *China Year Book*, 1927–28, 532–533, as estimated by Mr. Aspland, secretary of the International Anti-Opium Association.

<sup>67</sup> MAE, Série Asie 1918–29, Sous-série affaires communes, file no. 56, letter from the French consul in Canton, 20 September 1928.

<sup>68</sup> *Zhonghua guomin juduhui, Zhongguo yanhuo nianjian*, 44. Although published in 1931, the figures are for 1929.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Observations</i>
October 1929	160	diplomatic <sup>69</sup>	*
October 1929	1,000	diplomatic <sup>70</sup>	
January 1930	500	SDN/LON <sup>71</sup>	
December 1932	600	diplomatic <sup>72</sup>	estimate certainly includes simple outlets
April 1933	334	press <sup>73</sup>	
June 1934	300	press <sup>74</sup>	*
June 1935	300	press <sup>75</sup>	*
June 1935	700/800	NAOA <sup>76</sup>	includes the greater Canton area
August 1935	200/300	diplomatic <sup>77</sup>	
October 1935	300	press <sup>78</sup>	
October 1936	580	press <sup>79</sup>	cites an official source
December 1936	500+	press <sup>80</sup>	
March 1937	276	press <sup>81</sup>	registered opium houses
March 1937	260	NAOA <sup>82</sup>	number of opium house owners present at a meeting
April 1937	200+	press <sup>83</sup>	there had been more than 300 of them some months earlier

<sup>69</sup> MAE, SDN/LON series, Sous-série secrétariat général, file no. 1643, note on the situation in Indochina with respect to the opium question, 31 October 1929.

<sup>70</sup> MAE, Série Asie 1918–29, Sous-série affaires communes, file no. 54, report dated 9 October 1929 by Lieutenant Laurin (commander of the French detachment in Canton).

<sup>71</sup> SDN, file S196, interview with Thomas Maynard Hazlerigg, 18 January 1930.

<sup>72</sup> Nantes, Pékin, Série A, file no. 157, report by the French consul in Canton, 15 December 1932.

<sup>73</sup> YHB, 18 April 1933: see map 9 herein.

<sup>74</sup> XGR, 4 June 1934.

<sup>75</sup> XGR, 18 June 1935.

<sup>76</sup> *Judu yuekan* 90 (June 1935): 4.

<sup>77</sup> CO 825/19/6, report by the consul in Canton, 16 August 1935.

<sup>78</sup> *Renjianshi* 38 (20 October 1935): 20.

<sup>79</sup> *Xunhuan ribao*, 17 October 1936: the article cites the result of an official inquiry by the Guangzhoushi jinyan weiyuanhui.

<sup>80</sup> YHB, 30 November 1936.

<sup>81</sup> *Xunhuan ribao*, 31 March 1937.

<sup>82</sup> *Judu yuekan* 110 (March 1937): 28.

<sup>83</sup> *Canton Gazette*, 24 April 1937.

What stands out immediately from these figures is that they offer not a glimmer of hope of charting out any sort of chronological development. Nor do they allow for a definite estimate of the number of opium houses in Canton over this period. However, two pieces of information can be gleaned from these figures. First, we have a general order of magnitude that suggests that the number of opium houses in Canton, when related to the total population, was not very great. Indeed, even the highest estimate of 1,000 opium houses, which appears to be quite exaggerated even if we allow for the clandestine establishments, gives a rate of one opium house for 1,100 inhabitants on the basis of the 1932 census figures.<sup>84</sup> In the same period, that is, between the two world wars, France had one cafe per 100 inhabitants.<sup>85</sup> This comparison clearly shows that the opium houses in Canton did not carry much weight in relation to the city's population.

The number of opium houses can also be compared with those of other categories of establishment. The number of teahouses was of the same order of magnitude—408 in 1921. There were more than 800 currency exchange establishments in the 1930s,<sup>86</sup> and 654 hairdressing salons at the end of the 1920s.<sup>87</sup>

The second observation that can be made about this series of figures is that five of the estimates for the 1933–1935 period put the number of opium houses in the region of 300 to 350. Since the most reliable estimate is 334,<sup>88</sup> it would be reasonable to take 350 as a credible order of magnitude in and around 1935.

There is another argument to support this figure. In November and December 1936, the new opium administration set up by the Guomindang tried to compulsorily limit the number of opium houses in Canton to 200. However, this led the smokers to crowd into opium houses in conditions so unacceptable that the authorities were forced to increase the number to 300, which they did in several stages.<sup>89</sup> This U-turn was especially significant as the end of 1936 was marked by new restrictions on smokers (who were subjected to a census) and intense anti-opium propaganda. If 300 opium houses were needed to match supply to demand at a time when

<sup>84</sup> Edward Bing Shuey Lee, *Modern Canton* (Shanghai: Mercury Press, 1936), appendixes.

<sup>85</sup> Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby, eds., *Histoire de la vie privée* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1987), vol. 5, p. 120; Didier Nourrisson, *Le buveur du XIXe siècle* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1990), 97.

<sup>86</sup> Lee, *Modern Canton*, appendixes.

<sup>87</sup> Guangzhoushi zhengfu tongjigu, *Guangzhoushi zhengfu tongji nianjian*, 327.

<sup>88</sup> The journalist gives the figures for opium houses in twenty out of Canton's twenty-five districts (the five districts for which he gives no information were all on the periphery and in all likelihood had only a few tens of opium houses at most). Even if the reporter does not state his sources, they could have come only from a count made by himself or, more probably, from figures received from the authorities. That said, this is the only information I have that is different from a simple, intuitive estimate.

<sup>89</sup> Paulès, "L'opium à Canton," 237–240.

many occasional smokers were being encouraged to give up smoking, and hence stay away from opium houses, then it is quite plausible that the number of opium houses in the previous year had been in the region of 350.

Even without discounting the possibility of great variations in the numbers of opium houses, my earlier estimate of 1,000 as the ratio of opium houses to population now appears to have been clearly exaggerated—it was a hasty estimate no doubt encouraged by the attractiveness of a round figure. This is especially true of Lieutenant Laurin's report, whose purpose was to emphasize the scale of opium sales in Canton and the hypocrisy of the authorities.

It is more likely that the number of opium houses in the period under study was in the hundreds and, hence, that the ratio of inhabitants to opium houses was far more than 2,000.

### *Honam*

While the anti-opium writings sometimes mention the large numbers of opium houses, denunciations of the role of opium in Canton in the 1930s were more specifically about the concentration of opium houses on Honam Island. In passing, it must be said that, unlike in Shanghai or Wuhan, the opponents of the drug never attacked the French and British concessions in Shamian as havens for opium houses. The reason for this is very simple: neither at the end of the empire nor in Republican times were opium houses ever permitted in these concessions. In 1913 and 1921, when smokers tried to take refuge in Shamian to escape the stringent policy of prohibition imposed in the city, the Europeans were quick to stop them. For example, in June 1913 the European police delivered twelve individuals caught in the act of smoking on the island to the Canton authorities.<sup>90</sup> In 1930, the city's anti-opium bureau sent inspectors to the concessions, where they carried out raids on opium houses in cooperation with the island's police force.<sup>91</sup> This makes Canton an exceptional case. Here, the geography of the layout of the opium houses was completely independent of the presence of the foreign concessions.

Far from focusing on these concessions, the narratives were all presented in the same format, that of "the virtuously indignant visit to Honam." The story generally began with the crossing of the Pearl River on one of the numerous little boats that constantly plied between the two banks. The author would describe his arrival at Honam, often by night, allowing him to contemplate the myriad lights on the frontages of the opium

<sup>90</sup> SCMP, 21 March 1913, 8 May 1913, 3 June 1913; *Guangdong qunbao*.

<sup>91</sup> *Canton Gazette*, 13 January 1930.

houses lining the river.<sup>92</sup> On arrival at the island, the visitor would see roads thronged with passersby, but above all he would be struck by the brazenness with which the opium houses and parlors occupied the public space: "Once we came onto land, we found a very different atmosphere. No vehicle could enter these lanes cloaked by a prevailing darkness from which only busy silhouettes emerged. The electric lights of the opium houses are only decorations here.... There are about a dozen opium houses per street."<sup>93</sup>

Another description dwells on the ostensible presence of opium houses occupying the streets: "We saw numerous black cloths similar to banners on which large white characters were embroidered horizontally or vertically: 'tanhuachu' or 'yashi'.... Such are the signs of these demon's dens, such is the civilization of this brood (*xialiu shehui de wenming*)."<sup>94</sup>

If we add the smells of opium and the chirping voices of the hostesses (*yanhua*), who are also often mentioned, the imprint of opium on Honam becomes obsessive, literally saturating the visitor's senses (hearing, smell, and sight).

Apart from the anti-opium writings, there is an abundance of eyewitness reports by visitors, both Chinese and foreign, who went to Canton in the 1930s and described Honam as a place especially dedicated to opium and gambling.<sup>95</sup> This systematic presentation of Honam was based on reality because the particular concentration of the opium houses on Honam Island was an undisputable fact of the 1930s. This is seen in map 9, which gives a detailed view of the opium houses per 10,000 inhabitants in the various districts of Canton in 1933, based on a count published by the newspaper *Yuehuabao*.<sup>96</sup> The three districts forming the urban part of Honam had 101 opium houses, a little less than a third of the total. Now, in this period, these districts had a population of only 126,239, that is, barely 13% of the city's population.<sup>97</sup> Three years later, in 1936, a source claimed,

<sup>92</sup> YHB, 11 June 1931.

<sup>93</sup> *Minguo ribao*, 27 July 1931.

<sup>94</sup> *Judu yuekan* 90 (June 1935): 2. In the same vein, the XGR dated 21 January 1935 published an indignant description of the illuminated signboards, large decorations, and red posters that signaled the presence of the opium houses. Two tourist guides also mention the very conspicuous signage in Honam: Ni Xiyong, *Guangzhou* (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1936), 119; Huang Minghui, *Guangzhou ji Xianggang* [Canton and Hong Kong] (Shanghai: Xinshengming shuju, 1936).

<sup>95</sup> See among many examples: Wilbur Burton, "Remembered Days in Canton," CWR, 8 July 1933, p. 234; Ni Xiyong, *Guangzhou*, 119, 2; *Judu yuekan* 43 (September 1930); *Judu yuekan* 90 (June 1935): 11–12, XGR, 19 January 1935; Huang Minghui, *Guangzhou ji Xianggang*.

<sup>96</sup> YHB, 18 April 1933.

<sup>97</sup> *Guangzhoushi diaocha renkou weiyuanhui, Guangzhou ershiyinian renkou diaocha baogao* [Report on the 1932 census for the city of Canton] (Canton, 1933).

very probably with some exaggeration, that the island's three districts still contained almost half of the city's opium houses.<sup>98</sup>

What could have been the cause of this distribution? Two structural factors could explain why the opium houses were particularly bunched together in Honam: first, there was the weight of the impoverished sections, from whom most of the smokers were drawn,<sup>99</sup> in the local population.<sup>100</sup> Then, in the first half of the twentieth century, Honam was among Canton's livelier places, with its own theater,<sup>101</sup> as well as numerous restaurants, teahouses, and gambling parlors.<sup>102</sup> However, these two factors are not a sufficient explanation on their own. Canton in the 1930s had other districts with large populations of workers, and even very lively districts (for example, Chentang, well known for its brothels and renowned restaurants),<sup>103</sup> but none of them had a density of opium houses comparable with Honam's.

Certain sources from the 1930s suggest another explanation, seemingly both simple and attractive, that has been adopted by contemporary historians: they assert that opium houses were purely and simply prohibited outside Honam.<sup>104</sup> This assertion is totally false. There certainly was a prohibition of opium houses outside Honam, but it was limited, as we shall see, to an earlier, fairly brief spell of three years from 1926 to 1928. The error could stem from the pre-1928 regulations that prohibited the opium houses of Hopei from setting up shop in the busiest thoroughfares (*malu*). This prohibition also meant that the opium houses were far less visible, which could have led some witnesses to conclude, after a very hasty visit, that these houses were nonexistent. There could also have been some confusion with the prohibition of gambling (and not opium) outside Honam that was in force in the 1930s.<sup>105</sup>

Again, while Honam for three years had really been the only place where opium houses were permitted, this does not explain why this area had been chosen among so many others.<sup>106</sup>

<sup>98</sup> YHB, 26 November 1936.

<sup>99</sup> See chapter 7.

<sup>100</sup> The 1932 census gave an illiteracy rate of 40.5% in Honam against 38% for the entire city of Canton, figures pointing in all likelihood to a population of modest means.

<sup>101</sup> Established in 1916, the theater could seat 1,500: John Kerr, *A Guide to the City and Suburbs of Canton* (Hong Kong: Kelly and Walsh, 1918), 51–52.

<sup>102</sup> "Ji Guangzhou Chengzhu chalou," 183.

<sup>103</sup> Muramatsu Shōfū, *Nankan i asobite*, 291–296.

<sup>104</sup> See, for example, Huang Minghui, *Guangzhou ji Xianggang*; CWR, 29 July 1933, p. 356.

<sup>105</sup> Guangdongsheng jindu weiyuanhui, *Jindu gailan* [A brief look at the prohibition of gambling activities] (Canton, 1936), 227; CWR, 12 September 1936, p. 51; *Revue nationale chinoise*, April 1935, 169–178; *Canton Gazette*, 18 September 1936.

<sup>106</sup> Chen Dayou, "Yijiuierliu zhi yijiusansi," 123.

To be sure, it can be surmised that since Honam was situated on the other side of the river, the opium houses were less visible there and to some extent removed to a distance. However, Honam was not only administratively integrated into the Canton space but was also very closely linked to the northern bank by a vast fleet of small boats that would ferry visitors across within a few minutes for a derisory fee (3 *fen*, or a third of a bus ticket).<sup>107</sup> As it happened, a bridge between the two banks was completed in 1933. Again, while Honam enjoyed insularity in the strictly geographical sense of the term, this was not the perception on the ground. In addition to the bridge and the regularity and abundance of transport, we must remember Honam's size as compared with the small width of the body of water that surrounded it. While Honam was truly an island, it was nevertheless a "sub-insularity"—to coin a term that mirrors Philippe Pelletier's "super-insularity."<sup>108</sup>

If discretion was indeed the factor, then there were other more distant spaces, less well connected to downtown Canton, that would have certainly been more suitable than Honam as places in which to concentrate the opium houses. As it happened, when the municipal government unveiled a project in June 1934 for confining opium houses, dens, and brothels, it was the island of Dashatou, much further off the beaten path, that was chosen.<sup>109</sup>

#### Genesis of an Opium Haven: Honam from 1923 to 1929

The idea of finding a simple cause-and-effect relationship to account for the widespread presence of opium houses in Honam in the 1930s needs to be discarded. This presence was not the result of an official decision even if, as we have seen, the authorities played a considerable role in it. Nor was it logically determined by the social and geographical conditions of the 1930s.

We must return to the 1923–1925 period, when everything was decided. To begin with, it must be noted that the illustrations depicting Honam as a haven of opium were all made after this period. None of the documents consulted for the end of the imperial period and for the period 1912–1923 mention any specific link between Honam and opium. This is so in the descriptions of Honam found in Chinese, Western, and Japanese tourist

<sup>107</sup> *Quanguo lǚxíng zhīnán* [All-China travel guide] (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1926), 223. According to an article in the *Minguo ribao* dated 27 July 1931, there were about twenty boats plying between the two banks day and night.

<sup>108</sup> Philippe Pelletier, *La Japonésie: Géopolitique et géographie historique de la surinsularité au Japon* (Paris: CNRS éditions, 1998), 29.

<sup>109</sup> Ho, *Understanding Canton*, 147. The project came to nothing.



guides at the end of the 1900s.<sup>110</sup> Similarly, a *Huaguobao* report of June 1915 does not even mention Honam in its list of peripheral areas having clandestine opium houses.<sup>111</sup>

The 1923–1925 period saw a revival of opium after the ban imposed by Chen Jiongming. Despite prohibition, the opium houses reopened under the aegis of the different mercenary troops foreign to the province as well as that of armies more closely linked to the Guomindang.<sup>112</sup> As we shall see, the case of Li Fulin in Honam quite clearly illustrates the contribution made by these Guomindang allies to the return of the opium houses.

Li Fulin, a strongman and then a member of the Guomindang, protected the opium houses of Honam Island in the 1923–1925 period. Honam was an area that he had turned into an almost independent kingdom in the 1910s,<sup>113</sup> when he also engaged in active opium trafficking facilitated by his grip over the southern part of the Pearl River Delta.<sup>114</sup> The nature and scale of his activities made him no different from the other military chiefs hankering after new sources of revenue.<sup>115</sup> By the 1923–1925 period however, the opium houses probably preferred Li Fulin's patronage to others'. After all, he was himself Cantonese and well known (and even appreciated) by the locals, whereas the other military leaders, recent arriv-

<sup>110</sup> Ci Hangshi, *Guangzhou zhinan* [Guide to Canton] (Shanghai: Xinhua shuju, 1919), part 1, p. 4b; Chōsen manshū tetsudōin, ed., *Shina annai* [Guide to China] (Tokyo: Tetsudōin, 1919); Kerr, *A Guide to the City and Suburbs of Canton*, 50–53. For the imperial period, B. C. Henry, *Ling-Nam or Interior Views of Southern China* (London: Partridge and Co., 1886), 53, describes his visit to Honam without the slightest mention of opium, and this is only one of many such examples.

<sup>111</sup> *Huaguobao*, 17 June 1915.

<sup>112</sup> Chen Gongbo, *Kuxiao lu*, 22; *Guangdongsheng caizheng jishi*, 249; see also FO 371/10337, intelligence report from Canton Consulate General, 31 March 1924; CWR, 19 July 1924, p. 232; GMR, 28 May 1924.

<sup>113</sup> Li Fulin had already been master of Honam under Long Jiguang: *Huaguobao*, 21 December 1913, 18 November 1915. In August 1916, when war was raging between Long and the Old Guangxi Clique attacking from the west, many Canton dwellers found refuge in Honam: SCMP, 17 August 1916. A report dated 4 June 1918 spoke of Li as "King of Honam": MAE, Série Asie 1918–29, Sous-série Chine, file no. 24. His authority was spectacularly displayed on August 1924, when the merchants of Honam did not dare join the general strike by merchants in the rest of the city: Michael Tsin, *Nation, Governance, and Modernity in China, Canton, 1900–1927* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 83–87.

<sup>114</sup> Chereparov, *As Military Adviser in China*, 204, 225. A British source in 1923 referred to a subordinate of Li Fulin as being closely involved in a large gang of traffickers operating between Guangzhouwan, Canton, Hong Kong, and Macao (report by J. D. Lloyd on a syndicate of opium smugglers). The report has no date but was in a December 1923 dispatch by the British Embassy in Paris (Aix, Affaires politiques, file no. 2420).

<sup>115</sup> The Xiguan and Dongti districts were places with a high concentration of gambling parlors and opium houses under the protection Liu's and Yang's soldiers: Ye Shaohua, "Guangdong jinyan quanli," 112.



als from other provinces, were detested by the local populace.<sup>116</sup> Besides, these outside troops frequently changed station.<sup>117</sup> It was therefore normal for the population to prefer the little stability and security that Li Fulin could offer in Honam Island as compared with constantly shifting tutelage by outsiders.

It is therefore tempting to suppose that Honam from the 1923–1925 period onward was a favorite haven for opium smoking and gambling. This hypothesis is also supported by figures on the distribution of opium-related arrests made by the Canton police in 1921, 1922, and 1923 among the city's twelve districts. The figures are perplexing: in 1921 and 1922 when Canton was still dominated by Chen Jiongming, Honam (which coincided with district 11) was not among the districts that saw the most arrests (see map 7). However, 1923 saw spectacular change with Honam accounting for half of the arrests made in Canton.<sup>118</sup> Interpreting these figures is therefore a tricky job because the police possibly and even probably did not dare take action in certain areas controlled by intractable military chiefs. However, there is no apparent reason why they would make arrests in Li Fulin's preserve rather than elsewhere. In any case, this sudden emergence of Honam in the foreground of the opium question is a development that compels attention.

My own hypothesis is that it was actually in this three-year period that Honam became a preferred site for opium houses because of the political situation that then made the island a place of relative stability.<sup>119</sup> The spring of 1925 probably saw a strengthening of the trend toward setting up opium houses in Honam. This was when the unruly troops of Yang Ximin and Liu Zhenhuan were brought to heel.<sup>120</sup> This development considerably increased the power of the Guomindang and paved the way for the elimination of the opium houses or their takeover by a centralized opium administration. However, Honam continued to be under the effective authority of Li Fulin, who appeared to be unassailable. Li was a long-term party loyalist, his forces then amounted to almost five thousand men, and, besides, his role in the June 1925 fighting was decisive.<sup>121</sup>

<sup>116</sup> Yang Wanxiu, *Guangzhou jianshi*, 441.

<sup>117</sup> See for example: CWR, 3 February 1923, p. 409, 29 March 1924, p. 176, 19 April 1924, p. 272, 31 May 1924, p. 485.

<sup>118</sup> *Guangzhoushi jingchaju gong'an shixiang baogao, 1922–1923* [Guangdong Police Bureau, report on security questions, 1922–1923] (Canton, ca. 1923), 297; *Guangzhoushi shizhengting zongwu ke bianjigu, Guangzhoushi shizheng gaiyao* (n.p.).

<sup>119</sup> Lee, *Modern Canton*, 23.

<sup>120</sup> Chereparov, *As Military Adviser in China*, 138–146.

<sup>121</sup> Chereparov, *As Military Adviser in China*, 146, 161, 204.

The way in which opium houses were set up specifically in Honam in the weeks that followed the victory over the rebel troops was based entirely on rational considerations. In Honam, better than elsewhere, the opium houses could hope to escape from the total ban on opium proclaimed on 20 June in the enthusiasm of victory.<sup>122</sup> By the end of July, when realism once again became the order of the day and opium sales were again legalized, it was from the ban on opium houses per se that they found shelter in Honam.<sup>123</sup> Finally, a little later again, when opium houses became authorized in the rest of Canton, Honam Island was still a place where they could escape administrative control by the Opium Suppression Superintendent's Office (Jinyan dubanshu).<sup>124</sup>

In the months that followed, Li Fulin, who continued opium trafficking for his own profit, was ordered several times to put an end to his activities, and the Opium Suppression Superintendent's Office tried to negotiate a deal by which his little kingdom would also come under the common system. Every official press article that reported these negotiations claimed that Li had agreed to submit to the authorities.<sup>125</sup>

However, it is not very easy to know whether Honam actually came under the common legal system before being designated in subsequent years as the only place in the Canton urban space where opium houses could be tolerated. Be that as it may, from the 1926–1927 period onward, only simple opium sales outlets and home consumption were authorized in Hopei.<sup>126</sup> For reasons mentioned earlier, opium houses were already particularly numerous in Honam when this decision was taken: the authorities therefore acted with pragmatism, on the basis of the existing situation, in their choice of one area where these establishments would continue to be tolerated. All the same, we might ask why the authorities sought at this point to obtain a concentration of opium houses in a single defined area.

The authorities often claimed the status of “model city” for Canton. And various publications of the municipality in the 1930s made it clear that it was Hopei that was the city's showcase.<sup>127</sup> Hopei had the essential features, the avenues, museums, public parks, big stores, and new buildings, that were the symbols of a vaunted modernization, all sources of pride that would have turned into shame had opium houses been allowed

<sup>122</sup> *Guangzhou minguo ribao*, 23 June 1925, 2 July 1925, 3 July 1925.

<sup>123</sup> *GMR*, 23 July 1925.

<sup>124</sup> *GMR*, 19 August 1925.

<sup>125</sup> *GMR*, 1, 19, and 26 August 1925.

<sup>126</sup> Chen Dayou, “Yijiuerliu zhi yijiusansi,” 123; *Guangzhoushi shizhengting*, *Guangzhoushi shizhengting shehui diaocha gubao*, 8.

<sup>127</sup> Li Zonghua, *Mofan zhi Guangzhoushi*, 1, 75–77; *Guangzhoushi zhengfu*, *Guangzhou zhinan*, 27–36, 41–42, 113–118.

in their midst. Hopei was also the site of the historic city that had some years earlier been surrounded by ramparts. By designating Honam, which was not the “true” Canton, so to speak, the authorities were symbolically setting apart the opium houses. The gambling parlors, also ill viewed, were treated in the same way from 1925, that is, they were completely prohibited in Hopei and were tolerated only in Honam.<sup>128</sup> However, if Honam was, in its own way, not “truly” Canton, the island was easily reached, and the official aim after all was to avoid forcing smokers to go to remote, unreachable places and thus create conditions favorable to the development of illegal opium houses in the city. The solution that was chosen reflected a pragmatic attitude typical of Song Ziwen. It seems to have been fairly effective but lasted only a few years.

In September 1928, the commander of the Canton garrison, Deng Shizeng, demanded the immediate enforcement of existing laws and the consequent closure of Hopei’s opium houses within twenty-four hours. This call to order showed not only that the ban on opening opium houses in Hopei was still in force but also that it was facing a powerful counterthrust toward the return of illicit opium houses.<sup>129</sup>

Clearly, by May 1929, the opium houses had already been allowed to re-open, but it is not easy to know the exact point between September 1928 and this date at which the ban was lifted. It is very likely that their presence was tolerated before it was officially recognized. Be that as it may, Li Fulin, who had again played a very major role in December, in the repression of the Canton Commune,<sup>130</sup> left Canton for Hong Kong permanently in 1928.<sup>131</sup> His departure no doubt had some influence on the ending of Honam’s special status.

Although the exact date on which the ban on opium houses in Hopei—itsself a major turning point—cannot be known with any certainty, a regulation dated May 1929 makes it clear that by this date the opium houses had come under a “special system” (*zhuanyong*) in Hopei whereby they were officially tolerated provided that they were not situated on the main thoroughfares.<sup>132</sup> That the problem of opium houses in Hopei was not the

<sup>128</sup> According to *Judu yuekan* 91 (August 1935): 20, the gambling parlors were relegated to Honam in order to keep them out of sight of foreigners.

<sup>129</sup> *Guangzhou minguo ribao*, 24 September 1928.

<sup>130</sup> Harold Isaacs, *The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution*, *Guangzhou jianshi*, 470–471 (available at <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/isaacs/1938/tcr/ch05.htm>, accessed on 7 January 2017).

<sup>131</sup> Zhang Hanqing, ed., *Guangzhou baikequanshu* [Encyclopedia of Canton] (Peking: Zhongguo dabaike chuanshu chubanshe, 1994), 445.

<sup>132</sup> Ma Mozhen, *Zhongguo jindai shi ziliao*, 917–918. This ban on opium houses on the *malu* was always in force: XGR, 4 June 1934, 17 June 1935.

primary concern of this regulation suggests that their authorization was prior to this date, in fact if not in law, and was probably a consequence of Li Jishen's downfall and of the changes that had followed the takeover of the province by the central authorities. This puts our date then in March or April 1929. Honam then no longer had the monopoly of opium houses even if the ones on the island retained certain advantages that those on the opposite shore did not have.

#### Honam's High Noon and Sunset

Those sources expressing an opinion on the lifting of the ban in Hopei mention the desire of the authorities to increase opium sales and therefore opium-related income, which, as we have already seen, was tending to stagnate.<sup>133</sup> The fact is that the hoped-for increase in revenues required not so much a mere numerical increase in the number of opium houses as an improvement in the then inadequate controls exerted over the opium houses.

As we shall see, allowing opium houses to open in Hopei under a "more heavily taxed" system with far stricter controls than in Honam was part of a medium-term strategy to bring all of Canton's opium houses under a new system.

There were clear differences between Honam and Hopei. A special set of regulations published in February 1930 for the opium houses in Hopei is more informative on their status than those of May 1929.<sup>134</sup> The opium houses of Hopei came under markedly greater constraints than those of Honam. In 1930, in addition to the license (*paizhao*) that allowed them to open shop, the opium houses of Hopei had to buy a permit for each smoking service, and were allowed to sell the opium jars prepared by the monopoly only if they were properly sealed and stamped.<sup>135</sup>

At the very same time in Honam, the opium houses were paying only for the license and not for each smoking service. Above all, for a time at the beginning of the 1930s, the opium houses in Honam enjoyed the right to boil their own opium. By 1935, Honam owners were still recalling this privilege with painful nostalgia.<sup>136</sup> Those who did not boil their own opium could sell opium jars with broken seals. In both cases, this allowed for fraud on a colossal scale because the product could be mixed with contraband opium.<sup>137</sup> Official opium was blended with dross and smuggled

<sup>133</sup> Chen Dayou, "Yijiuerliu zhi yijiusansi," 126; *XGR*, 17 June 1935, 19 June 1935.

<sup>134</sup> *YHB*, 7 February 1920.

<sup>135</sup> *YHB*, 7 February 1920.

<sup>136</sup> *XGR*, 17 June 1935, 19 June 1935.

<sup>137</sup> *YHB*, 7 June 1931.

opium to an extent where it became, in the words of a journalist, an “open secret” (*gongkai de mimi*).<sup>138</sup>

Despite these distinctly less favorable conditions, the opium houses started recolonizing the northern bank of the Pearl River at a fairly brisk pace.<sup>139</sup> In January 1930, a League of Nations inquiry commission obtained a detailed list of no fewer than twenty-nine opium houses, all situated in the vicinity of Shamian, in Hopei.<sup>140</sup>

In the years that followed the lifting of the ban in Hopei, the authorities gradually gnawed away at the freedoms and privileges enjoyed by the Honam opium houses. They managed this effectively during the first half of the 1930s. Very clearly, it was the decision to allow the opium houses of Hopei to reopen that let them play one group against the other—something that would have been impossible when the opium houses of Honam were the only ones in the city. The opium houses of Honam naturally fought tooth and nail to safeguard their privileges against official attempts to limit fraud and impose heavier taxes as, for example, in June 1931, when the authorities tried to significantly increase the daily sales quotas that each opium house in Honam was required to meet according to its size.<sup>141</sup> This measure manifestly amounted to a proportional reduction in the possibilities of fraud. How the conflict ended is not known. The opium houses shut down in October of the same year in protest against an identical attempt by the authorities. The conflict ended this time in a compromise: the opium houses accepted a rise in quotas but one smaller than that initially proposed.<sup>142</sup> In this war of attrition, the owners of the Honam opium houses banded together under the leadership of the owners of the biggest opium houses and staged collective strikes to force the authorities to abandon their plans. The Hopei opium houses, however, had no interest at all in joining a movement to defend the privileges of their rivals. They stayed open, considerably lessening the chances of their rivals' success.<sup>143</sup>

This “divide and rule” strategy of playing Hopei against Honam paid off. Having accepted defeat in October 1931, the opium houses of Honam were faced with a new measure in June 1932 in which their quotas were significantly increased. The opium houses once again went on strike, and

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<sup>138</sup> *Minguo ribao*, 27 July 1931.

<sup>139</sup> XGR, 17 June 1935.

<sup>140</sup> SDN/LON, file S196, interview on 18 January 1930. The SDN dispatched an inquiry commission to the Far East in 1929 and 1930 to study the situation and make recommendations to the Bangkok conference on opium (November 1930).

<sup>141</sup> YHB, 7 and 10 June 1931.

<sup>142</sup> YHB, 8 October 1931.

<sup>143</sup> YHB, 11 June 1931.

the battle resumed.<sup>144</sup> Even worse was in store in the following year, when they lost the right to sell opium in unsealed jars.<sup>145</sup> In June 1934, an article in the *Yuehuabao* on privileges latterly lost by the Honam opium houses reported that they were no longer allowed to boil their own opium.<sup>146</sup>

By the mid-1930s, the opium houses of the Honam area no longer enjoyed any noteworthy privileges except that of purchasing slightly lower-priced opium from the monopoly.<sup>147</sup> That said, Honam continued to be the Mecca of opium in Canton, a space where the number of opium houses vastly exceeded the needs of the island's inhabitants. The fact that the opium houses remained concentrated in this area therefore can be understood only in the light of factors independent of their status under the regulations. Apart from the effect of inertia, which can explain why the opium houses already in place would remain, there were some real advantages that persisted even if they were not explicitly spelled out in law.

Rents, like land prices, were lower in Honam than on the northern bank.<sup>148</sup> However, the essential factor probably lay in the various forms of synergy that existed between opium and gambling, both of which continued to be prohibited outside Honam: smokers and betting enthusiasts were often the same persons.<sup>149</sup> According to an article in the *Judu yuekan*,<sup>150</sup> the gamblers who often went to Honam would without fail smoke a few pipes before going on to gamble. Certain gamblers even believed that smoking opium brought them good luck.<sup>151</sup> A Hong Kong merchant, an amateur gambler and opium smoker on a visit to Canton, knew that by heading for Honam he could have a pleasant night enjoying both his favorite pastimes.<sup>152</sup> The Honam District had this essential advantage of being the only place where people could combine the pleasures of gambling and opium.

<sup>144</sup> *Huazi ribao*, 4 June 1932.

<sup>145</sup> *YHB*, 3 July and 20 August 1933.

<sup>146</sup> It would seem that the opium houses of Honam were still enjoying this right in July 1931: *Minguo ribao*, 27 July 1931.

<sup>147</sup> *XGR*, 14 June 1935.

<sup>148</sup> A source from immediately after World War II gives a street-by-street listing of property prices in Canton in 1946. Prices in Honam were low, as they had doubtless been ten years earlier: Guangzhoushi shanghui, ed., *Shangye nianjian* [Business yearbook] (Canton, 1947), *biaozhun tijia* section.

<sup>149</sup> James Maxwell, *Guangzhou Henan weisheng gongzuo jihua* [Action plan for sanitation in the Henan area in Canton] (Canton: Guangdong jiating weisheng cujinhui, 1934), 9.

<sup>150</sup> *Judu yuekan* 90 (June 1935): 2.

<sup>151</sup> *Judu yuekan* 36 (December 1929): 43, quoted in Slack, *Opium, State, and Society*, 48–49.

<sup>152</sup> *YHB*, 11 December 1931.

*Beyond the Honam/Hopei Polarity: A Subtler Geography of the Opium Houses*

The geography of Canton's opium houses cannot be limited to the contrast between Honam and Hopei even if it was preponderant. There were districts within Hopei itself that also seemed to contain large concentrations of opium houses, albeit to a lesser extent than Honam. In the 1930s, for which the documents are relatively eloquent, this is what happened in the central districts situated along the northern bank of the Pearl River: Chentang, Taiping, Jinghai, and Yonghan (see map 9).

So far in this study, it is the role of the authorities that has been the key to understanding the distribution of the opium houses between Hopei and Honam as well as their development. In a finer analysis, however, it is the nature of the demand itself that becomes the main factor. Thus, the large number of opium houses in Chentang, Taiping, Jinghai, and Yonghan can be explained by the fact that, throughout the Republican period, they were the preferred areas of leisure activities in Canton, housing the city's most renowned restaurants and brothels.<sup>153</sup> These pleasure districts drew in large numbers of visitors who knew that here they could find all the pleasures they sought (except for the gambling parlors). Groups of friends could be seen there leaving a restaurant after a fine meal or a visit to the opera and heading straight for an opium house to continue their evening.<sup>154</sup> The presence of numerous opium house can be explained by this demand.<sup>155</sup>

At the opposite end of the scale were the districts with the lowest densities of opium houses (in certain cases one opium house per ten thousand inhabitants), such as Xichan, Fengyuan, Qianjian, or Guangxiao. These were relatively peripheral and predominantly residential areas. Here, a few local opium houses sufficed to meet the demand that came from residents alone. Then, in an intermediate position, came the administrative districts (Dexuan) or the districts dominated by business establishments and workshops (Changshou and Baohua). Here, there was a slightly larger number of opium houses to meet the needs not only of the district's inhabitants but also of people who went there in the daytime on business or for work. The Dongdi District deserves special attention. In Dongdi, the density of the opium houses was relatively high, although it was neither an administrative area nor was it dominated by business and crafts. The purpose of the opium houses here was to meet the specific needs of the

<sup>153</sup> Hamada Junichi, *Gendai dai Shina*, 1413; Ci Hangshi, *Guangzhou zhinan*, part 1, pp. 3a–3b; Ni Xiyang, *Guangzhou*, 118; Hu Puan, *Zhonghua quanguo fengsu zhi*, 4:7.

<sup>154</sup> *YHB*, 5 June 1931, 2 February 1932.

<sup>155</sup> An article in the *Judu yuekan* in September 1930 (vol. 43, p. 11) mentions Honam, Huadi, and the “lively areas of the city” as places where opium houses were concentrated.



rickshaw pullers, many of whom were opium smokers,<sup>156</sup> and who lived essentially in this area.

If we zoom in further on the map, we will see that in Honam as well as on the northern bank, certain streets were particularly dense in opium houses: in Hopei these were the areas neighboring Yidelu, Sihoujie, Diliupu, and Dabeizhijie.<sup>157</sup> These streets were also those with high concentrations of teahouses, restaurants, and brothels, again introducing opium into the range of pastimes available in certain areas of the city.

In Honam, certain streets stand out even more. These were the streets immediately leading from the landing stages for the boats that provided the shuttle service from Hopei: the most important among them were Aozhoujie and Nanhualu. However, Shuangguifang, Dan'ganxiang, and Baogang too were, to a slightly smaller extent, areas with a large number of opium houses.<sup>158</sup> This was clearly because consumers arriving from Hopei would naturally tend to enter the first establishments that they came across upon reaching the shore. The Honam smoking parlors also tended to be concentrated along the riverbank.<sup>159</sup> This location in the immediate neighborhood of the river is, as it happened, the reason why visitors who went to Honam by boat in the evening found the lights of the opium houses and gambling parlors to be so spectacular.

The lower visibility of opium houses in Hopei, their lower visual impact on the urban space, was of course primarily due to their lower concentration. At the same time, the fact is that the authorities in Hopei restricted the opium houses to the district's maze of alleyways. An anecdote from the *Yuehuabao* in 1930 speaks volumes: a man from the countryside who had come to Canton entered a dwelling in a lane and was immediately challenged by an inhabitant. Questioned by the police who rushed to the scene, the man said he had been walking along Huifu Avenue when he had felt a sudden craving for opium. Seeing the man looking for an opium house, the local had misunderstood his intentions, and seized him by the collar. The police judged the story to be credible and let the man go

<sup>156</sup> See chapter 7.

<sup>157</sup> *Judu yuekan* 90 (June 1935): 4.

<sup>158</sup> Dan'ganxiang, Aozhoujie, and Baogang are cited in an article in the *Xianggang gongshang ribao* (3 October 1936) as the streets best provided with opium houses in Honam. A systematic listing of the addresses of the opium houses cited in city briefs in the *YHB* in the first half of the 1930s absolutely confirms the predominance of these streets and especially that of Aozhoujie. This listing also identifies Nanhualu and Shuangguifang, not mentioned in the article, as places with a concentration of opium houses.

<sup>159</sup> *Judu yuekan* 91 (August 1935): 20.



without further ado. What this anecdote reveals is that anyone on a main thoroughfare in Hopei knew that all he had to do to find an opium house was to enter one of the adjacent lanes. Again, the opium houses in Hopei were discreet enough to make it seem quite credible to the police that an ordinary dwelling could be mistaken for an opium house.<sup>160</sup>

Hence, even if the number of opium houses was actually significant in certain places in Hopei, their "stamp" on the urban space was far lighter. This is especially true as the press tells us that almost all the big luxury opium houses, the ones that struck visitors by their size and opulence, were in Honam.<sup>161</sup> To be sure, looking at the ratio of opium houses to the population of a district is a somewhat rough approach to measuring the place of opium in the city. The ideal index would have been the ratio of the number of couches available in the opium houses to the population, but the sources are unfortunately silent on this aspect. These figures, if known, would very probably delineate Honam's preponderance even more sharply.

#### *The Underground Opium Houses on the Periphery*

The predominant position of a peripheral space such as Honam, which was the main characteristic of the distribution of opium houses in Canton, imparted a centrifugal aspect to the geography of these establishments. This centrifugal nature was further reinforced by the importance of another category of opium houses that were marginal in two ways. These were the illegal opium houses situated on the periphery of the Canton urban conurbation. The majority of the illegal opium houses were those set up in these peripheral areas, but this fact should not divert attention from the existence, in every period, of clandestine establishments in every district of Canton. It was common practice for opium houses to announce business losses, close shop, and then shortly thereafter reopen as illegal establishments on the very same premises.<sup>162</sup>

#### The Periods of Prohibition

Throughout the period under study, whenever opium was prohibited, there would be repeated and regular large-scale movements of opium houses toward the periphery of Canton. Brothels and smoking parlors too

<sup>160</sup> YHB, 1 June 1930. There was a very similar story in July 1935: a coolie carrying food offerings for funeral rites was struck by a similar urge. Leaving the main road, Changshou xilu, he went into a small adjacent street in search of an opium house. The offerings that he thoughtlessly left outside the opium house were thereupon removed by dishonest passersby while he was inside (YHB, 28 July 1935).

<sup>161</sup> YHB, 18 July 1930, 27 April 1933, 14 September 1933; *Minguo ribao*, 27 July 1931.

<sup>162</sup> YHB, 27 June 1934, 3 October 1934, 2 March 1936.

were part of this movement whenever they were similarly banned.<sup>163</sup> Certain peripheral areas were far less controlled by the authorities and yet close enough to Canton to become hotbeds for the proliferation of clandestine smoking establishments.

This migration of opium houses out of the city had already been seen at the end of the empire, for example in April 1908 when the police burned down three shacks used as opium houses in the vicinity of the Eastern Gate—outside the zone under police jurisdiction. Opium houses sprouted in other areas around Canton at the same time.<sup>164</sup>

The period of disorder that followed the downfall of the empire led to increased insecurity in suburban areas and accentuated the phenomenon.<sup>165</sup> In May 1913, in the city's eastern districts, the police arrested fifteen smokers in a single raid and burnt down no fewer than ten opium houses built with makeshift materials.<sup>166</sup> According to the *South China Morning Post*, opium and gambling also proliferated in 1913 in the districts beyond the Eastern Gate.<sup>167</sup> In July 1915, Wang Guangling, the new police chief in Canton, sent night patrols into the villages to the north and east of the city to track down smokers, large numbers of whom were congregating in secret.<sup>168</sup>

These were all areas where it was very easy to build shacks that could serve as clandestine opium houses, entailing no great loss to their owners if discovered and destroyed by the police. It should not be imagined that these places on the edges of the city, operating outside the law, were sophisticated buildings. All it took was a few planks of wood and some straw to build a shelter within a few hours.<sup>169</sup> Opium houses of this type, sometimes called *yanliao* (opium shacks), were also quite common in Guangdong villages.<sup>170</sup>

*Yanliao* proliferated again in the surroundings of Canton during the next period of serious prohibition at the beginning of the 1920s. This period saw a constant to-and-fro movement of smokers between Canton and

<sup>163</sup> Virgil Ho, "Selling Smiles in Canton: Prostitution in the Early Republic," *East Asian History* 5 (June 1993): 131.

<sup>164</sup> *Shishi huabao*, April 1908, p. 5b.

<sup>165</sup> Aix, GGI 65400, Canton press 1912, translation of an article dated 19 October 1912 in the newspaper "Jen Kiuen Pao." On the consequences of the fall of the empire on the rural areas of the Pearl River Delta, especially the emergence of local petty bosses, see Helen Siu, *Agents and Victims in South China* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 87–97.

<sup>166</sup> SCMP, 16 May 1913.

<sup>167</sup> SCMP, 27 October 1913.

<sup>168</sup> Aix, GGI 65402, Canton press 1915, translation of an article in *Changpao* dated 2 July 1915.

<sup>169</sup> YHB, 11 February 1931.

<sup>170</sup> *Lougang*, December 1929, 13–14.

the villages of Fangcun and Shancun situated in the southeast of the city, beyond the Pearl River and poorly controlled by the authorities. Everyday, at around 10 p.m., the seventeen opium houses in these villages would be emptied of their customers, who took boats back to Canton.<sup>171</sup>

#### Periods of Licensed Consumption

In normal times, that is, when there was no prohibition but only controls over opium consumption, these peripheral areas did not at all lose their attraction. It was in such periods that opium houses were set up in these areas to sell not official opium but smuggled varieties at prices that were highly attractive because they were tax free. These opium houses were therefore intended for less-well-off customers willing to brave their rudimentary levels of comfort, not to mention the constant threat of police raids, and other possible hazards including the uncertain quality of the narcotic,<sup>172</sup> customers willing also to make the tedious journey to these places. These opium houses were often next door to sheds used as gambling parlors and clandestine brothels set up in these very same areas—again in order to evade the taxes that had to be paid in town.<sup>173</sup> Such combinations of pleasures drew in more customers who could find the wherewithal to satisfy their different appetites in an area that, while remote, was still within one and the same perimeter.

The brief news items published in the years 1930–1936, especially from 1933 onward, reported police raids on these establishments with ever greater regularity. Even if we cannot rule out the possibility that this increase reflected increased repression,<sup>174</sup> or the fact that newspapers were taking greater interest in these events, this increase in police raids was probably the result of the tighter fiscal controls and pressures on legal opium houses in Honam mentioned earlier. As an article in the *Yuehuabao* suggests, these tax pressures made the illicit opium houses on the periphery even more attractive.<sup>175</sup> From 1932 onward, the ban on women working as waitresses (*yanhua*) brought another windfall to the *yanliao* that continued to employ these women.<sup>176</sup>

<sup>171</sup> *Guangdong qunbao*, 21 April 1921.

<sup>172</sup> An article in the *YHB* (25 June 1934) mentions the case of two men who visited an opium house of this type and found the opium there to be quite unfit for consumption, of an obnoxious flavor and texture.

<sup>173</sup> *YHB*, 6 August 1934, 7 October 1934, 3 November 1934; *Yuefeng* [Winds of Guangdong] 3/3 and 4 (November 1936): 12.

<sup>174</sup> Hinted at in an article in 1935: *XGR*, 16 June 1935.

<sup>175</sup> *YHB*, 29 July 1933.

<sup>176</sup> *YHB*, 17 November 1932, 18 July 1933, 24 March, 29 July, 15 September, and 21 October 1934, 17 November 1936. On the *yanhua*, see the next chapter.

The areas most concerned in the years 1930–1936 were the rural part of Honam, especially the Nancun-Mayongqiao area, and, to a lesser extent the Huadi quarter, as well rural areas situated to the north and the east of the city.<sup>177</sup> The number of illegal opium houses was clearly unrelated to the needs of the small local population. Lookouts were sometimes posted to alert smokers to imminent raids by the police who, upon arrival, would find little left to do apart from burning down the *yanliao*, as the smokers would have decamped by then. For better results, the police would often come in force and encircle these illegal opium houses.<sup>178</sup>

At the end of 1936, when smokers were subjected to a compulsory census and attempts were made to restrict the number of opium houses, the illegal opium houses on the periphery of the town became even more attractive.<sup>179</sup> Cantonese customers in search of these clandestine houses would head straight for the semiurban areas of Datunwei (a large island on the Pearl River to the northwest of Canton), Shiweitang (on the other side of the Pearl River to the west of Huadi), Fangcun, Huadi, Nancun, or Yongkou.<sup>180</sup> Feeling threatened by official resolve, certain smoking-house owners in Canton told a *Xunhuan ribao* reporter in March 1937 about plans to move out of the city if the projected ban on opium were to go through—which, however, they thought unlikely. The plan was to build *yanliao*-type opium houses in relatively peripheral rural areas that had already served them as fall-back zones: Shiweitang, Ezhangtan (a village some miles to the northwest of Canton), and Datunwei.<sup>181</sup>

This reference to possible fall-back zones in 1937 indicates that the clandestine opium houses were moving toward increasingly remote areas. This trend becomes pronounced in any comparison, based on Canton press reports, between the main peripheral zones occupied by clandestine opium houses in 1915 and in the 1936–1937 period, respectively (see map 8).<sup>182</sup> In 1915, these establishments were all situated in Hopei, in

<sup>177</sup> The following is a series of articles, among many others, from the *Yuehuabao* mentioning police raids in these areas: 30 October and 1 November 1931, 29 July 1933, 11 and 29 January, 24 March, and 28 July 1934. See also *Huazi ribao*, 10 April 1935; *Canton Gazette*, 18 March 1936, 3 and 7 July 1937; *Yuefeng* 3/3 and 4 (November 1936): 11–12.

<sup>178</sup> More than a hundred soldiers and inspectors were mobilized for an operation in January 1934: *YHB*, 11 January 1934. For other similar situations, cf. *GMR*, 21 March 1932; *YHB*, 2 August 1934, 21 October 1934, 3 and 7 November 1934.

<sup>179</sup> *XGR*, 21 October and 3 December 1936; Nantes, Pékin, Série A, file no. 752, annual report of the consular medical station in Canton 1936, 25–31.

<sup>180</sup> *Judu yuekan* 110 (March 1937): 26; *YHB*, 10, 17, 22, and 30 November 1936. These different areas are represented on map 8.

<sup>181</sup> *Xunhuan ribao*, 31 March 1937.

<sup>182</sup> The list of places concerned in 1915 is taken from the systematic count made by the *Huaguobao* for 1915 (especially articles published on 8 February, 12 July, and above all 17 June

the immediate neighborhood of the conurbation (the Donggao area was situated, for example, right at the Eastern Gate exit). Opium consumers would have gone to these areas on foot. In 1937, the clandestine opium houses were at far greater distances and essentially outside Hopei. The use of small watercraft to travel between Hopei and Honam or Huadi then became a necessity.

This modification of the geographical location of the peripheral opium house can be explained by the development of transport that made it easier to reach the more remote areas. However, it can also be explained by the fact that the administrative area of Canton where police authority prevailed became considerably enlarged in 1924.

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Opium consumption in Canton was not limited to the opium houses. For a variety of reasons, some Canton-dwellers chose to consume opium at home. Again, there was a large variety of establishments whose prime purpose was not just to cater to opium smokers. There were teahouses, restaurants, and hotels, even though opium consumption in these places was less common under the Republic than it had been before 1906. Under the Republic, the *julebu* and the brothels became the main places of public consumption of opium outside the opium houses.

At the same time, the opium house became the location par excellence for opium smoking. Quite naturally then, even though the number of such houses was fairly small—about 350 in the mid-1930s—anti-opium activists focused their wrath on the presence of these establishments in Canton.

The geography of the opium houses appears to have been generally dominated by a twofold dialectic between center and periphery: Honam, a relatively marginal space, was in effect distinct from the city as a whole in that it was being specifically marked by the drug and contained a large concentration of opium houses. However, this trend appeared only in the mid-1920s. The second aspect of this center/periphery dialectic was that semirural peripheral spaces, where official surveillance was minimal, retained the huge advantage throughout this period of escaping the vexations—in terms of bans or taxes—imposed by Canton's ruling powers. These areas were the preferred places for the clandestine establishments that sold smuggled opium at low prices.

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1915). For the period 1936–1937, it is the articles from the *Yuehuabao* and a one-off inquiry by the *Xunhuan ribao* that provide this data: see especially YHB, 10 and 17 November 1936; *Xunhuan ribao*, 31 March 1937.

Now that the real map of the presence of opium in Canton has been sketched, it might be interesting to look also at what could be called a “mental” map based on the perceptions of contemporary witnesses of the spatial footprint of opium in the city. This perception stemmed to a far greater extent from the very subjectively experienced “visibility” of the places of consumption than from the space that they actually occupied.

The sense of doom that pervaded the pages of the anti-opium publications was expressed abundantly, as we have seen, through descriptions that specifically targeted the Honam District, seen as the material expression of the imprint of opium on the urban space: not only did this area concentrate a large number of opium houses but also these houses were conspicuously visible with their imposing, brightly lit fronts. Other testimony indicates that, in the mental map that Canton’s inhabitants had of opium, Honam Island was seen as a place dedicated to the drug. For the anti-opium activists, therefore, the image of Honam tended to quite purely and simply take the place of Canton.

There are also reports by visitors who went to the city without any preconceived agenda for discovering the ravages of opium smoking and writing about them. Many visitors made no mention whatsoever of opium. This was the case for numerous reports by travelers who passed through Canton.<sup>183</sup> A systematic search through a series of reports on the city that appeared in the travel magazine *Lüxingzazhi* from 1934 to 1936 reveals not the slightest reference to opium.<sup>184</sup> This was not simply because these visitors were interested above all in ancient monuments and in the embellishments that the city had made for itself since the beginning of the Republican era. The fact is that they did notice the important space occupied by gambling in Canton and the city’s renowned “flower boats.”<sup>185</sup> Even if the image of “Canton as a gambling city” was a cliché,<sup>186</sup> the *Lüxingzazhi* narratives do challenge the perspective offered by sources whose design was to condemn opium and its uses. The impact of opium on the city was not very obvious to contemporary observers. Thus, if we step back a little from the usual sources, one important point stands out:

<sup>183</sup> Ci Hangshi, *Guangzhou zhinan*; Liu Zaisu, *Guangzhou kuailan* [Brief glimpse of Canton] (Shanghai: Shijie shuju, 1926); Xiang Shang et al., *Xinan lüxingza* [Notes on a journey to southern China] (1939), republished in *Jindai Zhongguo shiliao congkan*, no. 920 (chapters on Canton: 31–51); among the Japanese sources we may cite Kawahigashi Hekigotō, *Shina ni asobite* [Travels through China] (Tokyo: Ōsaka yagō shoten, 1919), chapter on Canton: 110–149.

<sup>184</sup> *Lüxing zazhi* 8/9 (1934): 23–29; 8/12 (1934): 43–45; 8/11 (1934): 40–45; 9/3 (1935): 29–34; 9/11(1935): 53–58.

<sup>185</sup> On gambling, see *Lüxing zazhi* 8/9 (1934): 28, and on the flower boats, *Lüxing zazhi* 8/12 (1934): 43.

<sup>186</sup> “One cannot avoid mentioning the Cantonese passion for gambling” is the leading sentence of the paragraph on gambling in Honam in the *Lüxing zazhi* article, p. 28.

unlike Shanghai or Macao, Canton is never described as a city massively dominated by opium.

Ultimately, even in the anti-opium publications of the 1920s and 1930s, the relationship between opium and the urban space came to be seen in terms of the concentration of opium houses in Honam. The crossing of the Pearl River, like that across the Styx, symbolized a passage to a space that, while Dantesque in its devotion to the vices of gambling and drugs, was also to some extent marginal. The relegation of opium to Honam was the spatial expression of its banishment to the fringes of society, a fact also expressed by the concentration of smokers in certain fringe groups of the population.

The symbolic withdrawal implied by this absolute or partial concentration in Honam should not be interpreted only as a demonstration of a double game by the authorities of allowing the opium houses provided that their presence in town remained discreet. It can also legitimately be seen as the manifestation in the spatial register of the powerful thrust toward pushing opium to the fringes.

## Life in the Opium Houses

Chinese cities in the second half of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of numerous places of sociability—public parks, teahouses, opium houses, gambling rooms, and theaters. Their importance increased as they attracted large sections of the population that hitherto, at least in the case of the common folk, would have restricted their outings to religious festivals, occasions when temples became spaces of collective recreation.<sup>1</sup> In the first half of the twentieth century, new forms of leisure—cinemas and dancing halls—were added to those already on offer. With the increasing importance of leisure, by the end of the Qing period, the cities, Shanghai in particular, came to be seen as “havens of leisure.”<sup>2</sup>

Current work by specialists on these spaces of sociability at the end of the empire and under the Republic is influenced by anthropology, cultural history, and micro-history, and focuses extensively on the effects of representation and interaction in these spaces. Such an approach makes for in-depth descriptions of life as it was lived in these places. In the case of the theaters and teahouses, for example, Joshua Goldstein has analyzed the underpinnings of the strategies of prestige and hierarchical structuring that were elaborated in these places, strategies linked especially to the position of the spectator in relation to the stage.<sup>3</sup> However, this approach has never served in any study on the opium houses as spaces of sociability.

Historians dealing with opium houses have been limited to two approaches. Some historians offer rapidly constructed typologies in which

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<sup>1</sup> Des Forges, “Opium/Leisure/Shanghai,” 169.

<sup>2</sup> Catherine Yeh, *Shanghai Love: Courtesans, Intellectuals, and Entertainment Culture, 1850–1910* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), 11–16 and 338–339.

<sup>3</sup> Joshua Goldstein, “From Teahouse to Playhouse: Theaters as Social Texts in Early Twentieth-Century China,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 63, no. 3 (August 2003): 753–780. Another, more classic study is Wang Di, “Ershi shijichu de chaguan yu Zhongguo chengshi shehui shenghuo” [Teahouses and social life in Chinese cities at the beginning of the twentieth century], *Lishi yanjiu* [Historical research] 5 (2001): 41–53.



the luxury opium houses are contrasted with the sordid dens intended for impoverished smokers. They sketch summary pictures of these two types of establishment, dwelling only on the number of customers and the quality of the equipment and delineating them in stark contrast.<sup>4</sup> Although this approach leaves aside social life in the opium houses, it at least gives us a clear picture of the wide range of the services on offer in these places. Other historians have been concerned above all with debunking the myth, widely prevalent in the Western imagination, of opium houses as places frequented by sordid, cutthroat types. To refute this notion, they have highlighted accounts by foreign travelers who describe their astonishment on discovering that these opium houses were actually clean, well-kept establishments. These sources also tell us that the opium houses were generally frequented, like any perfectly ordinary place, by individuals from a wide variety of social backgrounds for relaxation.<sup>5</sup> This second approach is useful in that it takes a look at social life in the opium houses. It is nevertheless superficial and prompts us to go beyond the snapshot view to discover the reality of daily life in the opium houses.

The purpose of this chapter is to take that research forward and give a far more in-depth account of the opium houses in all their variety as well as the complexity of their functioning. Such an ambition comes up against a predictable obstacle, to wit, the paucity of sources, which itself explains the absence of any extensive work on the opium houses. However, the daily press, eyewitness and firsthand accounts, literature, anti-opium writings, and a few diplomatic reports do offer an opportunity to describe the functioning, management, and daily life in Canton's opium houses. However, these documents date mainly from the second half of the 1920s and mostly from the years 1930 to 1937. This means that any description of the opium houses must be limited to these years.

The study of human relationships in the opium houses must be preceded by an account of the institutional, fiscal, and regulatory framework in which these houses operated, if only to highlight the constraints on their daily activity.

## **Institutional Control and Functioning of Opium Houses**

### *Institutional Control*

We have seen that the insertion of opium houses into the systems of opium regulation went through two distinct phases. In the first period, from 1907 to 1925, the opium houses were generally prohibited and, when tolerated,

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<sup>4</sup> Su Zhiliang, *Zhongguo dupin shi*, 193–194; Slack, *Opium, State, and Society*, 18.

<sup>5</sup> Dikötter, *Narcotic Culture*, 65–68; Ho, *Understanding Canton*, 132–133.

they were never a central part of the taxation systems. The authorities, incapable as they were of bringing any efficiency to bear on the collection of taxes from the opium houses, focused their attention upstream, striving to control and raise taxes on opium procurement and supplies for the entire province. Retail sales of opium, on the contrary, were allowed to continue almost out of official control. In these fifteen years, opium houses were practically never mentioned in those regulations that are extant. It might be assumed then that the houses enjoyed a fair degree of freedom.<sup>6</sup>

Things were altogether different in the 1925–1937 period. As the houses became increasingly integrated into the official system, they came under an ever-increasing tax burden, especially under Chen Jitang. The culmination of this trend came, as we have seen, around 1933 with the “nationalization” of fifteen opium houses that became part of the official apparatus. This integration of opium houses into the general circuit of the opium trade logically went hand in hand with more sustained attention paid to the functioning of these establishments.

These regulations influenced the activity of opium houses in three ways: they prohibited access to certain categories of consumers, exercised strict controls over opium supplies, and burdened the houses with a multiplicity of taxes.

#### Restrictions on Access

One of the measures that most directly influenced the daily functioning of the opium houses was the imposition of midnight closing times coupled with a prohibition on lodging customers for the night.<sup>7</sup> The curfew and prohibition of night guests were designed to stop opium houses from becoming gathering places for shady individuals in the late hours. However, the fact that the prohibitions were frequently reiterated clearly suggests that their application was problematic.

The regulations had a considerable effect on the functioning of the opium houses when they restricted access to certain categories. Surprisingly, there were no rules on age limits. As it happened, news items never mentioned the presence of children in the opium houses, whether incidentally or as a central fact.<sup>8</sup> The same remarkable silence on the presence of children prevails in all the sources concerning opium. Scandal-

<sup>6</sup> This does not at all mean, however, that the opium houses necessarily enjoyed a sort of “tax haven” since they could be preyed upon by local strongmen and military bosses.

<sup>7</sup> *Canton Gazette*, 18 August 1924; *YHB*, 24 August 1931, 22 September 1933, 8 July 1934, 16 November 1934.

<sup>8</sup> The only exception is an article in the *Yuehuabao* dated 11 June 1933: A mother came in search of her son aged fourteen who was in a Foshan opium house in the company of a man whose identity is not given in the report.

ized denunciations of the presence of young persons in opium houses are always about young adults. The need to legislate on children was not felt probably because their presence in opium houses was a subject of unanimous disapproval, even among smokers. Smokers generally felt that they had to consume opium in a "reasonable" manner so as not to fall into the misfortune of addiction.<sup>9</sup> Children were seen as being particularly vulnerable and likely to deviate from this code. Both opponents of opium and smokers agreed on at least one point: they saw children as being incapable of having an appropriate attitude toward opium even if each side had a different approach. Opponents of smoking believed in abstinence for its own sake. Smokers were for abstinence because they believed that even moderate consumption would lead children into dependency.

The fact is that all the attention and all the efforts by the authorities to regulate access to opium houses were focused on women. In any case, there were two reasons why the clientele of these establishments was mostly male: the large majority of smokers were men, and female smokers were reluctant to visit opium houses. However, the question of the *yanhua*, dealt with at the end of this chapter, shows that matters became even more clear-cut in March 1932: after earlier attempts without any lasting effect, opium houses were formally prohibited from receiving females, whether as employees or as customers. This decision clearly resulted from the determination of the authorities to put a stop to two subjects of scandal: public consumption of opium by women and the employment of *yanhua* to serve opium.<sup>10</sup> These regulations of 1932 were applied in a sustained manner. Women caught in opium houses were henceforth arrested and punished.<sup>11</sup>

### Controls on Opium Supplies

For the different monopolies, forcing the opium houses to sell only legal varieties of *yangao* was a vital aspect of control over the opium circuits.

First, the opium houses were required to purchase a fixed daily quantity of opium. The chief aim of this method was not to maximize consumption but to limit the possibility of blending official opium with smuggled opium.

The authorities also required certified packaging so that opium could be authenticated during inspection visits. However, once an official box of

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<sup>9</sup> See chapter 7.

<sup>10</sup> The *yanhua* became the target of a full-blooded press campaign denouncing the indecency of their behavior and the number of smokers' conversions that they caused by attracting young men to the opium houses.

<sup>11</sup> Among numerous news items: *Canton Gazette*, 1 August 1933; *YHB*, 27 April 1933, 10 July 1933, 28 September 1933, 1 February 1934, 22 September 1935.

opium was opened, nothing could prevent an opium house from mixing it with varying amounts of smuggled opium. This difficulty led to a radical measure applied first in Hopei and then in Honam that required that customers be sold only boxes "sealed" by the monopoly.<sup>12</sup> It was therefore forbidden to sell opium from already opened boxes. Each customer had to buy a sealed jar of opium corresponding to the dose that he wished to consume. In 1935 therefore, there was a range of sealed, white porcelain jars with contents corresponding to a wide range of prices from 2, 4, 6, and 8 *jiao* up to 1 or even 2 yuan.<sup>13</sup> This method drew inspiration from practices of the colonial monopolies such as those of Macao and Hong Kong and amounted to one more step toward full control over the circuits.<sup>14</sup>

Making it obligatory to use officially prepared opium also brought uniformity in the quality on offer and made it impossible for any one opium house to distinguish itself from its rivals by the special skills of its own opium boiler<sup>15</sup> and vaunt its uniqueness. It is quite significant here that only the semiofficial opium houses were granted the right in 1933 to boil their own opium. The purpose was to bring quality-sensitive customers together in the establishments that were the least able to escape the vigilance of the opium suppression bureau and, at the same time, yielded the most revenues.<sup>16</sup>

The increasingly strict integration of the opium houses into the official opium distribution system did not only mean a heavier tax burden and fewer possibilities of fraud but also offered at least one advantage. It reduced corruption and racketeering.

The fact is that, for the managers of the opium houses, visits by inspection teams were always stressful events. Government agents were quite willing to go beyond their prerogatives and engage in racketeering under cover of inspection.<sup>17</sup> Thus, extortion was not confined to unruly soldiers in troubled times. Other predators, inspectors and leading officials of the opium suppression office, entered the fray and even replaced the military, while the official sources and the press were disinclined to report such

<sup>12</sup> See chapter 4.

<sup>13</sup> *Judu yuekan* 90 (June 1935): 3–4. A Japanese source mentions jars costing 2, 4, and 6 *jiao* and 1 or 5 yuan: Kōain Seimubu, *Kanton no sembai jigyo* [The activities of the monopolies in Guangdong] (Tokyo: 1939), 4.

<sup>14</sup> SDN/LON, file R4869, letter dated 10 June 1935 addressed to an individual suspected of indulging in opium traffic in Hong Kong, translated and forwarded to the commission by the representative of Great Britain. Specimens of small cylindrical boxes sealed by the Macao opium monopoly are found in the FO file 228/3371. The boxes were made of brass.

<sup>15</sup> YHB, 9 June 1934.

<sup>16</sup> XGR, 18 June 1935.

<sup>17</sup> *Renjianshi* 38 (20 October 1935): 19; *Huazi ribao*, 12 June 1928.

abuses.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the burden of taxes and fees was increased in proportions that it is difficult to estimate, by the addition of bribes in kind and in cash.

In this respect, the stabilization that came about with the organization of the Guangdong opium suppression bureau from 1931 onward and the relative "bureaucratization" of the system that came from it had a beneficial effect. Not only did the military stop being a threat, but the inspectors were also prevented from behaving illegally under the pretence of looking for smuggled opium. This was achieved by the institution of very precise protocols for searching individual smokers in the opium houses. A poster from the Guangdong Province Opium Suppression Bureau in 1934 preserved in the archives of Guangdong Province, apparently meant to be posted in all opium houses, very clearly spells out the rules. One of the most important of these rules was that the opium suppression bureau teams could not carry out searches unless accompanied by the police.<sup>19</sup> Accounts of police raids in the 1930s, both on opium houses and on individual homes, show that this rule was being followed.<sup>20</sup> As a rule, as soon as the inspectors of the opium suppression bureau obtained any interesting information, they would alert the police of the concerned district and organize a joint raid on the presumed location of the offense. Once the offenders were arrested, their cases would be pursued by the police.

One affair narrated in the *Yuehuabao* shows that the managers of the opium houses were perfectly aware of these rules intended to protect them. In 1934, an inspector making his rounds discovered that the Zhuoji opium house, which had officially ceased activity, had nevertheless reopened in clandestine fashion. He entered the premises, notified the manager of the offense he was committing, and started removing what he called incriminating evidence. The manager replied that since the inspector was not accompanied by a policeman, his action was illegal. The men then came to blows. The affair ended at the police station where the manager was fined—because he had hit the inspector, not because he had reopened a clandestine business.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> A magazine devoted to news stories about Lougang Town, to the west of Kaiping, describes a similar affair at the end of 1929: *Lougang yuekan*, December 1929, p. 26. The Canton press, probably through self-censorship, made little reference to shady business involving inspectors, except for a strike by the opium houses provoked by a case of unambiguous extortion: *YHB*, 3 July 1933. A witness of the period also reports the repacity and venality of the inspection staff in the 1920s: Chen Dayou, "Yijiuerliu zhi yijiusansi," 126.

<sup>19</sup> Guangdong Province Archives, series no. 2/2, file no. 78, proclamation dated 7 December 1934.

<sup>20</sup> For example: *YHB*, 10 May 1930, 12 June 1930, 9 July 1930, 16 July 1930, 6 September 1930, 16 October 1930, 27 October 1931, 1 March 1932, 6 March 1932, 9 September 1933, 1 October 1933, 3 October 1934, 22 September 1935.

<sup>21</sup> *YHB*, 27 June 1934. A fairly similar story: *YHB*, 1 October 1933.

Taxes and Profits in the Mid-1930s

Restrictions on entry and controls over supplies were not the only ways by which the authorities influenced the functioning of the opium houses. The profits earned by the establishment and therefore even its survival depended to a great extent on the taxes it had to pay. An inquiry by the Hong Kong newspaper *Xianggang gongshang ribao* in June 1935, when the system set up by Huo Zhiting was at a high point, provides for an assessment of the tax burden on the opium houses as well as its impact on their financial equilibrium.<sup>22</sup>

According to the inquiry, the quota system made it obligatory for an opium house to sell at least 7 *liang* of prepared opium per day.<sup>23</sup> The house paid 6.28 yuan per *liang* or 95% of its final retail price for the customer: 6.6 yuan.<sup>24</sup> In addition, an opium house with, say, 14 couches would pay a total “couch tax” of 2.8 yuan (0.2 yuan per couch) and another tax on lamps (to the police) of 1.4 yuan per day (0.1 yuan per lamp), giving a total amount of 4.2 yuan on taxes. Overheads including rent, food, staff, tea, oil, and the like amounted to at least 5 yuan per day. As for receipts, the house could count on a small profit from the sale of prepared opium (0.32 × 7 = 2.32 yuan), and from the resale to the monopoly of the dross collected from the consumption of 7 *liang* of opium (7 yuan). Here is a summary of daily receipts and expenditures in one opium house:

<b>Receipts:</b>	Profit from sale of opium: 2.32 yuan	<b>Expenditures:</b>	Overheads: 5 yuan
	Resale of dross: 7 yuan	Taxes:	4.2 yuan
<b>Total:</b>	9.32 yuan	<b>Total:</b>	9.2 yuan

Here, the profits earned by an opium house were almost zero, and these figures do not mention the fact that it was sometimes difficult to sell the 7 *liang* required by the official quota. The opium houses therefore barely made any profit, a situation already noted in a 1929 report.<sup>25</sup> Of course,

<sup>22</sup> XGR, 19 June 1935.  
<sup>23</sup> The inquiry does not explicitly mention it, but the number 7 corresponds to 14 couches available in the opium house. A report at the same time states that the opium house had a minimum of 14 couches and that half a *liang* had to be consumed per couch: CO 825/19/6, report by the consul in Canton dated 16 August 1935.  
<sup>24</sup> This same percentage was already applied in 1930: regulations of February 1930, YHB, 7 February 1930.  
<sup>25</sup> MAE, Série Asie 1918–29, Sous-série affaires communes, file no. 54, report dated 9 October 1929 by Lieutenant Laurin.

once the opium houses had met their quotas, they could discreetly sell smuggled opium. However, it was clear that, by 1935, strict controls over the system had made fraud far more difficult than in 1929. It is therefore by no means a coincidence that opium house managers questioned in 1935 waxed indignant above all about the quotas, then the most efficient anti-fraud mechanism. They felt that these quotas were fixed at an almost unattainable level, leading to the closure of numerous establishments in Canton, a phenomenon confirmed by another source.<sup>26</sup>

That said, fraud was not the only factor that could mitigate this highly gloomy situation. To begin with, the numerous closures of the opium houses that did take place in and around 1935 must be seen in a general context of crisis for all Cantonese businesses.<sup>27</sup> Besides, it would be risky to draw conclusions on the income of the opium houses solely from the statements of their owners, who would have taken care not to tell the reporter from the *Xianggang gongshang ribao* about secondary sources of profit such as the sale of cigarettes, sweetmeats, and fruits.

Again, more than a little caution is needed when approaching the inquiry's reported figures on "expenditure." The taxes were fixed very precisely by the rules, and the reporter's estimates are reliable. As for the overheads, however, the opium-house owners naturally had a tendency toward exaggeration.

Despite these reservations, the June 1935 inquiry does confirm that the opium houses had become a cash cow for the administration and that taxes weighed heavily in their operation. The ratio of taxes (4.2 yuan) to overheads (5 yuan) appears to have been very high. Not only did the opium houses have to buy opium from the monopoly at high prices, but their scope for committing fraud was ruthlessly restricted and, on top of that, they had to pay numerous taxes. Also, competition from the clandestine houses did not improve matters for the well-established places. It is probable, then, that the situation of the opium houses in 1935 was difficult enough for a considerable number of them to close shop.

The increased integration of the opium houses into the general system meant that, in the first half of the 1930s, they were heavily subjected to restrictions on entry for certain smokers, supply-side constraints, and a heavy tax burden. Even if, after 1925, there was no longer any real political will to oppose any increase in the numbers of opium houses, these various

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<sup>26</sup> XGR, 14 June 1935, 17 June 1935, 19 June 1935; YHB, 9 June 1934.

<sup>27</sup> The *China Critic* referred to the closure, at the beginning of 1935, of more than 3,000 shops, whereas in 1934 the city had about 37,000 business establishments. The general situation and its difficulties were undoubtedly serious (*China Critic*, 9 May 1935, 138; Guangdong-sheng gonganju, *Shimin yaolan* [Overview of the city's population; Canton, 1934], 6).



constraints made these businesses less attractive and therefore, perhaps indirectly and involuntarily, worked toward a restriction of their numbers.

*The Management and Organization of an Opium House*

Material Elements

We have seen that high taxes had a major effect on the financial equilibrium of the opium houses. It did not encourage the opening of new establishments. However, this does not mean that there was no interest in opening an opium house as compared with other businesses. A look at the material conditions necessary for opening an establishment suggests that the equipment needed was astonishingly limited, to go by an inventory confiscated in the mid-1930s from a small opium house in Hong Kong:<sup>28</sup>

Two opium pipes (stems)	Four "opium bowls"
One teapot	Five teacups
One tea tray	Two opium lamps
Two opium trays	One box of opium dross
Four needles	One jar of oil
Two enamelled plates	Two dross dishes
Six pillows	One copper lock
One pair of scales	One table clock
Three jars made of horn	

Curiously, this inventory does not include the beds, which, in this case, would be the main investment. It is true that beds were often replaced by simple mats for the low-grade opium houses.<sup>29</sup> However, it must be noted that the equipment in this inventory was both very limited and of no great value.

We may conclude that running a modest-sized opium house required very little capital investment. The initial investment was small. As for the expenditure on opium purchases, it did not require much rolling capital for the simple reason that it was not necessary to purchase large quantities of opium in advance and that any money invested was very quickly recovered when the opium was consumed.

The fact that it was easy to open an opium house without risking large sums of money could partly explain why Canton's opium houses were so ephemeral. The sources available do not allow this phenomenon to be

<sup>28</sup> MAE, SDN/LON series, Sous-série secrétariat général, file no. 1642, report by the French consul in Hong Kong dated 15 January 1935.

<sup>29</sup> Ouyang Shan, "Pigun shijie" [A world of rogues], in *Ouyang Shan wenji* [Ouyang Shan's works] (Canton: Huacheng chubanshe, 1988), vol. 1, p. 375 [the news was published in 1935]; *YHB*, 25 June 1933.



measured with full accuracy. However, one observation speaks for itself. In all the available documents for the 1924–1936 period, of the 214 times that opium houses are mentioned along with significant details on their locations (in general only the street name), there is only one establishment referred to over a time span exceeding one year. This is the Dasixi opium house in the Aozhou District in Honam, which appears in the documents over a span of three years (1930–1933).<sup>30</sup> This seems to indicate that the opium houses did not last very long. Another reason for this rapid turn-over in opium houses could be that the constraints of the official system often pushed them into fraud for the sake of profit, thus exposing themselves to the constant risk of closure.

These figures that suggest that the opium houses did not require heavy investment applied nonetheless only to the modest establishments.

Conditions in the luxury opium houses were quite different. These establishments required considerable outlays for furniture and high-quality equipment. An idea of these outlays can be had from a burglary in 1934 when a mere 23 pipes and 90 *liang* of prepared opium were robbed from an opium house: the cost to the establishment was estimated at more than 1,000 yuan.<sup>31</sup>

The initial investment for such establishments was so great that very often several partners had to come together to put up the necessary sums. Unlike in the modest opium houses (where the manager was often the owner himself), the day-to-day management of the establishment would be entrusted to a third party—a simple manager (*dongzhu* or *laoban*) earning a salary paid to him by the group of shareholders (*guyou*, *hegu*).<sup>32</sup> Occasionally, one of the investors would take charge of the management. In one case, four associates entrusted the management of the opium house to two of them (called in turn *dong* and *laoban*).<sup>33</sup> In another example, two men would form a partnership (*hegu*) in which one would furnish the majority of the capital, while the other took charge of management.<sup>34</sup>

Strangely, despite the scale of the investment needed to set up a luxury opium house, it seems that these places were no exception to the general rule of great instability. One might have expected to see long-lived opium houses of renown, veritable institutions of well-earned repute, in the manner of certain restaurants, for example, but this was not at all the case. Considerations of fashion probably played a role here. Frequent name changes perhaps explain the apparent lack of longevity of these establishments.

<sup>30</sup> *Yugong sanrikan* 51 (circa 1930); YHB, 4 September 1933.

<sup>31</sup> YHB, 19 December 1934.

<sup>32</sup> YHB, 11 February 1931, 14 September 1933.

<sup>33</sup> YHB, 3 December 1931.

<sup>34</sup> YHB, 20 December 1931.

One luxury opium house in the Huifu Road neighborhood, which changed its owner (and probably its name as well) twice within a few years, is the only known example of the continued operation of an opium house on the same premises through successive changes of proprietors, but this could well have been a common type of event.<sup>35</sup>

#### The Categories of Opium Houses

The material data on the management of the opium houses clearly shows their diverse nature, warranting an examination of their different categories.

A very broad-ranging and not very precise terminology makes this task rather difficult. The press and firsthand reports of the period contain a large number of indistinctly used terms: *yashi* (elegant parlor), *yanku* (opium room), *yanshi* (opium parlor), *laohuwu* (tiger's den), *jieyanshi* (detoxification parlor), *yanguan* (opium-smoking establishment), *tanhuashi* (conversation parlor), *shouxisuo* (sales and consumption establishment), and so on. It is not at all easy to perceive the fine nuances that existed in this fog of terminology.

On the whole, there were two classes of explicit typologies used during this period. Thus, an article in a journal in 1935 distinguishes solely between the large luxury establishments and the opium dens frequented mainly by the rickshaw pullers.<sup>36</sup> An article in the *Yuehuabao* in 1934 mentions two types of opium houses in Canton—*gaodeng tanhuaguan* (top-quality parlors) and *xiaji jieyanshi* (low-quality opium houses)—but gives no details.<sup>37</sup> And an article in the *Xianggang gongshang ribao* sketching a panoramic view of Canton's opium houses also distinguishes between only two types of establishments (apart from the specific case of the official opium houses, which were only a subclass of the luxury opium houses).<sup>38</sup>

This binary model dominates not only the sources but also, as we have seen, historical studies. Thus, the way in which Su Zhiliang deals with this question is as surprising as it is significant. Su begins by saying that the opium houses in the late-Qing period fell under three categories catering to clients of varying financial circumstances. However, a few sentences later, when he starts describing the opium houses, he deals with only two cases:

<sup>35</sup> YHB, 3 December 1931.

<sup>36</sup> *Renjianshi* 38 (20 October 1935): 19–21. An article in the journal *Judu yuekan* (77 [ca. 1934]: 21–22), on the opium houses of Shantou, draws a similar portrait: the higher-class categories of opium houses required high investment and were patronized by wealthy people, as opposed to the basic opium houses with their poorer customers marked by the signs of their addiction.

<sup>37</sup> YHB, 16 November 1934.

<sup>38</sup> XGR, 17 and 18 June 1935.

the luxury opium houses and the opium houses for the poor.<sup>39</sup> It would seem then that the binary model was irresistible. This study will first take a look at the two types of opium houses that Su places in opposition.

*The Luxury Opium Houses* While there was no strictly established terminology for them, the opium houses of this time were often called *tanhuashi* (conversation parlors) or *gaodeng tanhuaguan*.<sup>40</sup> Besides, the ideogram *shi* (室) was generally used in Canton to describe the more luxurious tea-rooms (*chashi*).<sup>41</sup> The main feature of opium houses of this type, which could not be missed from the exterior, was their size. There were few of them, but they made up for it by taking up several floors and often an entire building—usually of “Western” (*yanglou*) style.<sup>42</sup> Often signaled by neon lights, the entry to these opium houses was decorated with parallel sentences stuck to the pillars and extolling the pleasures of opium and the attractions of the place.<sup>43</sup>

The ground floor of these big opium houses was a vast hall kept for customers who paid the lowest rate. This hall was clean but simple, with several dozen beds fairly close to one another.<sup>44</sup> It was named after the minimum amount paid for entry (for example, the “6 *jiao* hall” in the Lingnan opium house). It was also quite simply known as the “big hall” (*dating*).

Other halls and rooms of decreasing size (and increasing privacy) were distributed among the upper floors. They too were named according to the sums of money (in rising order) that one had to spend on opium in order to be allowed entry (in the Lingnan establishment, for example, there were the “8 *jiao* room,” “1 yuan room,” and “1.6 yuan room”). In another case, the second hall was called the *keting* (guest hall), and the fanciest hall was called the *huating* (flower hall). The nature of equipment and furniture in these halls was increasingly luxurious.<sup>45</sup>

The general rule therefore was that the degree of luxury offered to the customer rose with the floor, as did the degree of privacy: in the upper

<sup>39</sup> Su Zhiliang, *Zhongguo dupin shi*, 194–195.

<sup>40</sup> YHB, 16 November 1934, 19 December 1934; *Renjianshi* 38 (20 October 1935): 20; *Min-zoku Taiwan* 3/4 (April 1943): 41.

<sup>41</sup> *Renjianshi* 33 (5 August 1935): 30–32; Guangzhou nianjian bianzuan weiyuanhui, *Guangzhou nianjian, jingji*, 344. According to the *Renjianshi*, the smallest teahouses were called *erliguan* and those of an intermediate rank were called *chalou*.

<sup>42</sup> XGR, 17 June 1935; *Renjianshi* 38 (20 October 1935): 20; *Judu yuekan* 79 (ca. 1934): 31.

<sup>43</sup> *Judu yuekan* 90 (June 1935): 4, 79 (ca. 1934): 31; XGR, 4 June 1934; Huang Minghui, *Guangzhou ji Xianggang*, 14; *Renjianshi* 38 (20 October 1935): 20.

<sup>44</sup> The cheapest room in the Lingnan opium house contained forty to fifty couches: *Minguo ribao*, 27 July 1931.

<sup>45</sup> XGR, 17 June 1935; *Minguo ribao*, 27 July 1931; *Judu yuekan* 90 (June 1935): 4.

floors, there were at times even special, richly furnished cubicles.<sup>46</sup> This model of vertically graded distinction was not limited to the Cantonese opium houses, as an article in the journal *Judu yuekan* describes the same phenomenon in the Shanghai opium houses.<sup>47</sup> This practice seems to have been fairly universal: in the Canton gambling houses too, the fanciest gambling rooms were situated on the upper floors, while the common folk occupied a hall on the ground floor.<sup>48</sup> A Japanese traveler mentioned a similar organization in the teahouses of Hong Kong and Canton.<sup>49</sup>

"Big" rather than "luxurious" might be a more apt handle to describe these opium houses, as their customers were not all wealthy. The big hall on the ground floor could very well receive persons of fairly small means, even coolies seeking a little extra pleasure on a special occasion.<sup>50</sup> Besides, they were effectively large places, sometimes taking in hundreds of customers every day.<sup>51</sup> They generated considerable economic activity: a robber who forced open the safe box of an opium house in April 1933 was able to make away with the tidy sum of 690 yuan.<sup>52</sup>

Unlike in Shanghai, for which there are illustrations of late-Qing luxury opium houses giving a fairly precise idea of their interiors, for Canton we have to be satisfied with written descriptions. All the same, the illustrations from Shanghai, for example those of the *Dianshizhai huabao* (Dianshi illustrated journal), the celebrated periodical of Shanghai (1884–1898), do give an idea of the decor in a luxury opium house in Canton (see illustrations 9 and 10). The rooms in which the smokers reclined were spacious and had high ceilings. Calligraphy and paintings decorated the walls, and beautifully sculpted couches added the necessary atmosphere of distinction to these place.<sup>53</sup> As for Canton under the Republic, the attention of eyewitnesses during their incursions into the luxury opium houses was

<sup>46</sup> YHB, 15 January 1932; interview with Mr. Mai Zhaoshen dated 15 July 2008.

<sup>47</sup> *Judu yuekan* 43 (September 1930): 10.

<sup>48</sup> *Judu yuekan* 91 (August 1935): 21.

<sup>49</sup> Muramatsu Shōfū, *Nankani asobite*, 56–57. C. Henriot also refers to the Shanghai brothels where the upper floors, as opposed to the ground floor, were the spaces most sought after (*Prostitution and Sexuality in Shanghai*, 286).

<sup>50</sup> For example, 6 *jiao* had to be paid to enter the big hall in the Lingnan opium house. This was a third of the daily wage of a Cantonese mason at that time (Maritime Customs, *Canton Decennial Report* [1922–1931], 188). A bus ticket cost 1 *jiao* (*Wenhua jianshe yuekan* [Cultural improvement monthly] 2/3 [December 1935]: 146).

<sup>51</sup> The Lingnan opium house thus received three to four hundred clients per day in 1931 (*Minguo ribao*, 27 July 1931).

<sup>52</sup> YHB, 27 April 1933.

<sup>53</sup> *Dianshizhai huabao*, vol. 6, no. 4, p. 32; vol. 16, no. 11, p. 86; vol. 28, no. 1, p. 7; vol. 30, no. 1, p. 8.

obviously drawn to the rooms on the upper floors. In addition to high-quality furnishings and well-finished decor including fresh flowers, there were modern comforts: electric fans in summer and heating for cold winter days.<sup>54</sup> The staff was always smiling and thoughtfully attentive. It comes as no surprise that businessmen appreciated these opium houses as places to do business and make deals.<sup>55</sup>

The luxury opium houses had a wide variety of services on offer. First, there was a large choice of opium: not only the monopoly opium but also costly varieties based on Indian opium, such as those of the Indochina Government Monopoly, were available to customers.<sup>56</sup> Certain particularly old and renowned pipes might be used in these places.<sup>57</sup> Opium was far from being the only item consumed: smokers could enjoy sweetmeats, fruits, and cigarettes, as well as high-quality teas. The fruit served not only as snacks but also to refresh throats parched from smoking opium.<sup>58</sup> In case of need and if the opium house did not have a kitchen,<sup>59</sup> an employee would be sent to buy a snack from outside. Thus, in one case a customer arrived at a high-class opium house at midnight and immediately sent for *nuomiji*, a snack made of glutinous rice and chicken, from the neighboring teahouse.<sup>60</sup> There is also mention of a wide range of distractions: radio, singers, storytellers, and masseurs.<sup>61</sup> In periods when not prohibited, there would be *yanhua* offering to prepare opium for customers.<sup>62</sup>

This extensive range of services meant that social distinctions in the luxury opium houses worked on site (and not through the prohibition of access to the humbler folk). Each consumer had many ways to display his social status. Treating himself to a massage, a few sweets, or cigarettes would not elevate a consumer very far above the most modest consumer. One who smoked a variety of Indian opium, took a private room, or asked for the use of a very valuable pipe would be more likely to enhance his social status, and one could of course accumulate these different tokens of prestige. However, making use of the services of a famous *yanhua* was probably what constituted the most outstanding expression of social

<sup>54</sup> *Renjianshi* 38 (20 October 1935): 19–21; *Judu yuekan* 79 (ca. 1934): 31.

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Mr. Mai Zhaoshen dated 15 July 2008.

<sup>56</sup> XGR, 18 June 1935.

<sup>57</sup> YHB, 5 August 1931.

<sup>58</sup> YHB, 10 January 1932.

<sup>59</sup> This was sometimes the case: YHB, 3 December 1931.

<sup>60</sup> YHB, 15 January 1932.

<sup>61</sup> Interview with Mr. Mai Zhaoshen dated 15 July 1908; XGR, 17 June 1935; *Yugong sanrikan* 35 (ca. 1930); *Judu yuekan* 90 (June 1935): 6.

<sup>62</sup> *Minguo ribao*, 27 July 1931; *Renjianshi* 38 (20 October 1935): 20; YHB, 15 January 1932.

prestige. The following table provides an overall view of the various options available to a customer as he entered a big opium house:

Options producing social distinction in a luxury opium house (by degree of prestige obtained)

Degree of prestige			
1	2	3	4
superior Chinese opium	Indian opium		
		famous pipe	
	upper-floor room	private room	
fruit			
cigarettes			
high-quality tea			
snack			
massage			
	ordinary <i>yanhua</i>		famous <i>yanhua</i>

*Yantiao Dens* There were different names to designate the wretched down-scale opium houses always described in opposition to the big opium houses: one was *jieyan yantiao fenxiaochu* (sales outlet for opium detoxification). Sometimes less precise terminology was used, for example, *xia-ji jieyansuo* (low-quality opium house).<sup>63</sup> The old term *eryanguan* (house vending recycled opium), which dated from imperial times, had not fully disappeared.<sup>64</sup>

In these places, *yantiao* would be consumed as opium. We have already seen that this was very cheap, adulterated opium essentially based on dross in solid form, rolled into little ready-to-use stems.<sup>65</sup> This explains why the *yantiao* dens were also known in the Cantonese smokers' slang as "hard-stuff establishments." The term "hard stuff" is another name

<sup>63</sup> *Renjianshi* 38 (20 October 1935): 19–21; *YHB*, 5 May 1933, 4 February 1934, 9 March 1934, 3 November 1936.

<sup>64</sup> *YHB*, 25 June 1933, 10 April 1934, 9 March 1934.

<sup>65</sup> *Renjianshi* 38 (20 October 1935): 19–21.

for *yantiao*, probably because it did not take liquid form like the classic prepared opium known as the “soft stuff.”<sup>66</sup>

These *yantiao* dens were externally far more discreet than the luxury opium houses: the firsthand reports make no mention of any conspicuous signboards. Inside, they often consisted of only one room for everybody. That meant that they occupied only one floor, often the more easily accessed first floor, but this was not an absolute rule. The fact is that the rent for an upper floor was cheaper. Sometimes, the customer would have to climb a staircase to get to the opium house.<sup>67</sup> The interiors of the single rooms in which all the customers reclined have always been described as spartan, dark, and filthy. In one *yantiao* house, the mats on which the customers reclined were items of deceased persons bought at a discount from their families.<sup>68</sup>

A fairly summary illustration shows the interior of such an opium house in Canton in the late Qing. The illustrator is happy to emphasize the dilapidated condition of the furniture and the poverty of the consumers who thronged to these places (plate 11).<sup>69</sup> There was only one little luxury, tea, which was available in abundance. The beverage appears to have been actually inseparable from the opium pipe. The customers are almost always described as coolies, haggard and physically marked by excessive smoking.<sup>70</sup> Rickshaw pullers were especially numerous.<sup>71</sup> Besides, the *yantiao* establishments tended to set up shop near the rickshaw depots.<sup>72</sup> Some of these houses were even run by rickshaw owners who would allow their rickshaw pullers credit and let them sleep in at night, using the beds in the opium house.<sup>73</sup> Certain opium houses would rent out rickshaws to rickshaw pullers and give them free accommodation on condition that they consumed a fixed daily quantity of opium. This had the advantage of creating a base of loyal customers. Moreover, it cost the owners little to allow their men to sleep in establishments that had to close at night in any case.<sup>74</sup> And then again, allowing them to run up credit was

<sup>66</sup> XGR, 18 June 1935.

<sup>67</sup> *Judu yuekan* 90 (June 1935): 4.

<sup>68</sup> YHB, 25 June 1933; *Renjianshi* 38 (20 October 1935): 20.

<sup>69</sup> *Shishi huabao* 15, July 1907, p. 12b.

<sup>70</sup> YHB, 4 February 1934.

<sup>71</sup> YHB, 10 April 1934, 2 November 1935, 2 and 3 November 1936; XGR, 18 June 1935.

<sup>72</sup> *Renjianshi* 38 (20 October 1935): 20; YHB, 6 October 1934.

<sup>73</sup> XGR, 18 June 1935; *Renjianshi* 38 (20 October 1935): 20; YHB, 2 and 3 November 1936. In these extreme cases, certain rickshaw owners, who roused the indignation of the press at the time, forced the richshaw pullers whom they lodged to consume a fixed, daily quantity of opium: YHB, 4 February and 9 March 1934.

<sup>74</sup> XGR, 25 February 1935. This practice clearly infringed on the prohibition against allowing consumers to spend the night in an opium house.



another way of attracting custom from coolies.<sup>75</sup> A British report estimates that Canton had 40 *yantiao* dens in 1935.<sup>76</sup>

*The Elusive "Neighborhood Opium House"* The two types of opium house just described are often set in opposition to each other by the sources. The various studies that mention the existence of different categories of opium houses generally do not go beyond this approach. However, there are clues to suggest that a description cannot be limited to these two categories. First, a well-documented article in the *Xianggang gongshang ribao* dated 3 October 1936 maintains that there were not two but three types of opium houses in Canton, which corresponds to an eyewitness report from the period.<sup>77</sup> Second, the different categories of opium houses defined in the regulations in no way correspond to the expected binary model. Thus, in 1924, three categories of opium houses were defined.<sup>78</sup> Third, the press shows that when the houses are described in sufficient detail, they in no way correspond to these two types of opium houses. Clearly, there were many small opium houses where the customers smoked not *yantiao* but prepared opium and where a relatively mixed clientele rubbed shoulders. The predominance of the binary module can be explained above all by the fact that only these two extremes can be easily identified and contrasted with each other, whereas similar contrasts cannot be drawn in the case of the average opium house.

These average opium houses do not lend themselves to colorful descriptions of sumptuous furnishings, nor can they be painted as sinister places devoted to the self-destruction of cohorts of coolies (plates 10, 11). This suggests that the only reason that opium houses of this other type are less visible in the documents, even if they were more numerous, is that they were eclipsed by the two extreme models. We must therefore imagine the existence not just of these extremes but also of a scattering of small establishments in Canton. An inquiry conducted by the sociology department of Lingnan University<sup>79</sup> in the small village of Jiufenghuang in a rural part of Honam Island is a source of information on its two opium houses. These houses had eight and nine beds for a customer base of thirty and forty customers per day, respectively, and were probably quite similar to those "neighborhood" opium houses frequented by a customer base of

<sup>75</sup> YHB, 25 June 1933; XGR, 18 June 1935; *Renjianshi* 38 (20 October 1935): 20.

<sup>76</sup> CO 825/19/6, report by the consul in Canton, 16 August 1935.

<sup>77</sup> Interview with Mrs. X on 11 July 2006.

<sup>78</sup> National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), series no. 679 (Maritime Customs), file no. 14220, Canton district occurrences (January-June 1924), report dated 19 January 1924.

<sup>79</sup> Huang Enlin and Wu Ruilin, *Jiufenghuangcun diaocha baogao* [Report on an inquiry into the village of Jiufenghuang] (Canton: Lingnan shehui yanjiusuo, 1935), 61.



local inhabitants,<sup>80</sup> customers who would go to establishments close to home or to their place of work, generally at the time of their afternoon nap or at the end of the day. The employees of a hairdresser's salon in Xiguan would go every evening after dinner to an opium house facing their shop.<sup>81</sup> Three friends would meet daily at 7 P.M. at the same opium house to pass the evening in conversation.<sup>82</sup> The local opium houses did not offer as many services as the big ones but still often served fruit, cigarettes, and the services of one or two *yanhua*.

The fact that these houses drew clientele from their vicinity created some familiarity among customers. On one afternoon in 1932, the owner of an exchange bureau situated beneath an opium house spotted a thief in his shop. His immediate reaction was to go up to the opium house and call for help from the customers, all of whom were known to him. Seven or eight of them came down, and together they were able to overcome the thief.<sup>83</sup>

Various reports indicate that customers would call one another by nicknames and exchange gossip and anecdotes about one another.<sup>84</sup> In addition, there was often a mingling of people from different social classes. A young man of good family could be seated next to a worker.<sup>85</sup> A man managing a small factory manufacturing bamboo items would go to an opium house after dinner with his brother and two of his employees.<sup>86</sup> An article in the *Yuehuabao* describes an opium-house owner who was obsequious toward his rich customers but enjoyed humiliating his poorer customers, even habitual ones. This suggests the mix of social classes that visited his establishment.<sup>87</sup>

While there can be little doubt about the inexactness of the typology in which luxury opium houses were contrasted with *yantiao* dens, its recurrence in the sources is revealing. These two habitual portraits actually define two reference models that produced effects of imitation and demarcation. The luxury opium houses were the positive pole or, to put it differently, an attractive pole. This was the pole that inspired other opium houses to imitate their refinements. Opium-house owners tried their best

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<sup>80</sup> YHB, 17 January 1934: A news item thus mentioned two habitués of an opium house on Dexing Road who were next-door neighbors on that very same road.

<sup>81</sup> YHB, 16 June 1931.

<sup>82</sup> *Wuxian manhua* 3/3 (18 January 1931): 6.

<sup>83</sup> YHB, 10 February 1932.

<sup>84</sup> YHB, 7 January 1932.

<sup>85</sup> YHB, 14 December 1935.

<sup>86</sup> YHB, 20 June 1932.

<sup>87</sup> YHB, 29 October 1931.

at the same time to separate their establishments from the other pole: the filthy, wretched *yantiao* intended for coolies.

It can be understood then that demarcating the boundaries between these different categories is a problem. Of course, in human sciences, any attempt at classification comes up against the stumbling block of arbitrariness about boundaries. A refusal to carry out any classification on these grounds alone would amount to a sort of epistemological nihilism. In the case of the opium houses, however, it would not be irrelevant to emphasize that certain *yantiao* dens strove to widen their customer base by making improvements in the furniture or in the way in which customers were received, so that they approached the level of the average opium house.<sup>88</sup> Similarly, the boundaries between luxury opium houses and neighborhood opium houses were imperceptible, the latter taking the form of establishments that had a couple of floors and a few rooms.<sup>89</sup>

The type of customer is not an appropriate criterion by which to characterize the different types of opium houses. Only the *yantiao* opium houses were truly marked by the type of client who visited them. The boundary between luxury opium house and local opium house was defined ultimately in relation not so much to the customer base as to the greater variety on offer in the luxury opium houses. As seen earlier, both the local opium houses and the big opium houses were places of at least relative social intermingling.

### Life in the Opium Houses

These descriptions of the three types of opium houses might tempt the observer to see the *yantiao* houses as thoroughly sordid places where customers went in briefly for the quick fix. Only the neighborhood and luxury establishments seem to have offered a terrain propitious to the development of some degree of social life. However, the descriptions of the *yantiao* opium houses were so clearly marked by a desire to paint a picture of hellish places that the narratives of human relationships in these places cannot be taken at face value. It is the nature of the sources and that alone which makes it possible to draw portraits of life and sociability only in the luxury and neighborhood opium houses. And, these two cases cannot always be treated separately. The boundary between them was not always very clear, and, besides, certain parts of the big opium houses were quite accessible to a very mixed range of customers.

<sup>88</sup> YHB, 10 April 1934.

<sup>89</sup> The opium house where Mrs. X worked was an intermediate case of this kind (interview with Mrs. X on 11 July 2006).

These reservations apart, it must also be noted that we know little about life in the Cantonese opium houses before the turn of the 1930s—and what we do know is only thanks to the *Yuehuabao*. Although this newspaper maintained a resolutely hostile tone toward opium consumption, it nevertheless provides a sum of interesting information that has no equivalent in the entire Canton press. So thorough is the nature of its miscellaneous news items sections that, beyond the particular anecdotes that prompted these reports, certain recurring details can be identified. This means that it is possible to piece together numerous, varied scraps of information and painstakingly construct a base of knowledge about daily life in the opium houses. As for firsthand reports by readers who visited these places, their bursts of virtuous indignation were, so to speak, nothing but background music that fortunately does not distort the generally descriptive tone of their articles. In this respect, they are radically different from the disappointingly meager articles in the anti-opium journals that described the Canton opium houses on the model of the rake's progress into hell, places where the writer found exactly what he had gone to Canton to find: murky opium houses peopled by wretched souls. The *Yuehuabao*, on the contrary, helps us to answer a series of fundamental questions on life in the opium houses.

#### *Was the Opium House a Dangerous Place?*

The opium house as a place of damnation was not a purely European cliché. Two novels by the Canton writer Ouyang Shan contain descriptions that could be truly representative of the way in which writers and intellectuals of the period generally perceived the opium houses. These novels are about an unemployed worker, Wang Xiaocun, hired to maintain order in an opium house frequented by very violent customers. Wang's predecessor has died in a brawl in this opium house. The habitués include a collection of artisans, shopkeepers, rickshaw pullers, and a fortune-teller, all bullies who harass other customers and especially the staff itself. These men insult the other customers, spit into teacups, and wreck equipment. In one example of the violence that was part of ordinary life in this establishment, a customer with an intense craving comes in carrying a chopping knife that he tries to pawn to the house against his dose.<sup>90</sup> But did this narrative correspond to reality?

#### Links with the Underworld

The newspapers dwelt extensively on the cliché of the infamous opium house, embroidering on the theme of *liangdai nanfen* (the grain cannot be

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<sup>90</sup> Ouyang Shan, "Pigun shijie," 373.

separated from the chaff).<sup>91</sup> The opium houses are described as dens of hoodlums happy to come together to plot evil deeds and share their loot.<sup>92</sup> Good people who had the misfortune to end up in these places would surely fall into bad company, as in the example from 1935 of the wealthy Cantonese man who befriended two individuals in an opium house. Things took an unfortunate turn for him when the pair, having heard him out on the subject of his wealth, proceeded some days later to get him kidnapped for ransom.<sup>93</sup>

Although it seems very likely that criminals would often go to opium houses to take opium,<sup>94</sup> only once is there reference to any direct or indirect control exerted by the secret societies (*heishehui*) over the opium houses in Canton between 1906 and 1936. An article in the *Guangzhou minguo ribao* in August 1924 tells us that the recently dissolved "Secret Society of Nineteen Friends" (*Shijiu you*) had been racketeering in the opium and gambling houses. Some of its leaders were arrested in an opium house.<sup>95</sup> One source that speaks about the Japanese occupation, and is therefore from a period later than that covered here, mentions a certain Pan Man, a big-time criminal who owned dozens of opium dens and houses.<sup>96</sup> It is surprising that these are the only existing references to any link between the secret societies and opium, when these societies notoriously kept a grip over opium houses in other Chinese cities, such as Chengdu and Shanghai. In Shanghai, Du Yuesheng's famous Green Gang organized opium circuits for its own profit, especially in the French Settlement. For the Green Gang, the taxes on the opium houses were a financial windfall that they shared for a while with the very complacent French authorities.<sup>97</sup>

<sup>91</sup> *YHB*, 14 June 1931, 22 September 1933, 21 February 1935; *Canton Gazette*, 5 July 1934. A similar expression, "*liangyou buqi*," was used for the opium house of the Chaozhou region in Tao Kangde, *Yapian zhi jinxi*, 65.

<sup>92</sup> *Canton Gazette*, 12 July 1924.

<sup>93</sup> *YHB*, 21 February 1935.

<sup>94</sup> See chapter 7. A study on the Paoge secret society in Sichuan shows that certain opium houses, quite like teahouses, were preferred meeting places for its members. Qin Heping, "Dui Qingji Sichuan shehui bianqian yu Paoge zisheng de renshi" [Social transformations in Sichuan during the Qing period and the creation of the Paoge company], *Shehui kexue yanjiu* [Scientific sociology research] 133 (March 2001): 122–123.

<sup>95</sup> *GMR*, 4 August 1924.

<sup>96</sup> Tan Zijing, "Ji Guangzhou lunxian shiqi heishehui touzi Pan Man" [Notes on the crime boss Pan Man during the Japanese occupation in Canton], in *Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi Guangdongsheng Guangzhoushi weiyuanhui*, *Guangzhou wenshi ziliao* (Canton: Wenshi ziliao yanjiu yuanhui, 1965), vol. 14, pp. 185–187.

<sup>97</sup> Brian Martin, *The Shanghai Green Gang, Politics and Organized Crime, 1919–1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 45–63; Jonathan Marshall, "Opium and the Politics of Gangsterism in Nationalist China, 1927–1945," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 8 (July–September 1976): 33–38.

In Chengdu, the equally famous Gelao hui (Elders' Society) distinguished itself by the profits that it derived from opium.<sup>98</sup> The fact that no details have been found attesting to this type of hold by criminal gangs in Canton by no means implies that the secret societies were not involved in one way or another in the opium houses. Virgil Ho, too, in his remarkably well-documented study on prostitution in Canton, is quite surprised about the apparent absence of secret society involvement in this sector.<sup>99</sup> What is more, according to a witness who lived in a village close to Canton in the 1930s, it was widely known that the secret societies were protecting the gambling houses, whereas he had never heard of any such involvement in the opium trade.<sup>100</sup>

Again, the enumeration of the evil effects of opium in Canton in the anti-opium literature as well as the official documents refers to links between opium and warlords, military leaders, and local bosses in the countryside but never mentions opium as a possible source of income for the secret societies. This absence is all the more perplexing as these documents mention the effects of gambling on society, often on the same page as the discussion of opium, always stating that gambling was used by criminals to get wealthy.<sup>101</sup>

The links between the underworld and the opium houses are therefore not as clearly established as the hold of the military over these places during periods such as from 1923 to 1925, when the military leaders systematically bled various localities in Canton. All in all, it is quite possible that the secret societies had no particular hold over the opium houses in Canton. A possible explanation for this lack of involvement of the Canton secret societies might be their weakness. If Li Jiezhi, a high official in the Canton police from 1936 to 1938, is to be believed, it seems that those secret societies that had not been totally wiped out had at least suffered serious attrition when Wu Tiecheng was chief of police (February 1923 up to the departure of the Northern Expedition).<sup>102</sup> Li's report must be read with caution, of course, since Wu Tiecheng was then president of the Guangdong provincial government and was probably an ideal object of flattery from a subordinate. The fact remains however that Wu's efficiency as chief

<sup>98</sup> Stapleton, *Civilizing Chengdu*, 205–206.

<sup>99</sup> Ho, *Understanding Canton*, 264.

<sup>100</sup> Interview with Mr. Y on 11 July 2006.

<sup>101</sup> *Guangdong nianjian* [Guangdong statistical yearbook] (Canton: Guangdongsheng zhengfu mishuchu bianyishi, 1942), 67; Guomindang Guangdongsheng dangbu, *Jinyandu zhuankan* [Special edition on the suppression of gambling and drugs] (Canton, 1936), 37.

<sup>102</sup> Li Jiezhi, *Liangnian lai zhi gaige* [The reforms made in the past two years] (Canton: Guangdongshenghui jingchaju, 1938), 27.

of police was generally well recognized.<sup>103</sup> The influence of the secret societies could therefore have been greatly reduced by Wu's actions.

This in no way rules out the possibility that certain establishments were the lairs of the Canton mobsters. However, for the city's opium houses as a whole, the great majority of their customers were workers who went there for a brief spell of relaxation after work and not louts come to carouse through the night. This much is clear from the fact that the peak hours in these opium houses were from 1 P.M. to 4 P.M. and from 7 P.M. to 11 P.M.<sup>104</sup>

#### Brawls and Violence as a Daily Affair

Although it is difficult to know whether the underworld had any hold over the opium houses, Canton newspapers of the time suggest that the opium houses were places in which violence proliferated (without any involvement by organized crime). The local news reports indicate that there was a high frequency of violent acts committed in these opium houses. However, one distinction must be drawn here: there were certain periods when the opium houses were the scene of numerous attacks with firearms and many killings and other periods when bare-fisted brawls and petty thieving made the news. The opium houses were actually representative of the general climate of violence that shrouded the city. In troubled times, typically when public order was being trampled upon by garrisoned military forces, there were frequent reports of killings in the opium houses. On a typical day in June 1924, the press reported two deaths, following outbreaks of gunshots in two different opium houses. One of the deaths was probably due to a settling of scores, while the other resulted from an inspection visit that had gone wrong.<sup>105</sup> Between 1922 and 1925, troops from Hunan, Yunnan, and Guangxi, poorly disciplined and led by unscrupulous commanders, brought chaos to the city. These were times that saw numerous reports of armed attacks, blackmail, and score-settling. Thus, in May 1925 eight armed individuals launched a night attack against an opium house.<sup>106</sup> On 21 July 1925, a group of seven to eight men attacked an opium house at high noon. Four of them, when arrested and questioned, admitted that they were soldiers garrisoned in Canton.<sup>107</sup>

The atmosphere from 1930 to 1936 was quite different. These were the years when Chen Jitang managed to bring some order to the city. Violence did not disappear, but it changed both in degree and in aspect. It was now restricted to brawls that could at times be violent but were

<sup>103</sup> *Revue nationale chinoise* (May 1937): 170.

<sup>104</sup> *XGR*, 17 June 1935.

<sup>105</sup> *GMR*, 8 and 9 June 1924.

<sup>106</sup> *GMR*, 14 May 1925.

<sup>107</sup> *GMR*, 25 July 1925.

generally conducted without weapons and almost never lethal. In these scuffles, pipes became clubs and opium lamps became projectiles. The cause would often be a prolonged wait by a customer made tetchy by his craving.<sup>108</sup> Other factors could come into play. The favors of the *yanhua* provoked innumerable rumpuses that crowded the miscellaneous news section of the *Yuehuabao*.<sup>109</sup>

The relative insecurity of the opium houses was also expressed in the frequency of theft, often committed by customers who would try to make away with opium pipes. Opium pipes were fairly costly items, even if they were not rare. In one example, on 18 July 1930, an individual took advantage of an instant when he thought that nobody was watching him, slipped a pipe into his clothes, and moved toward the exit, but he was caught by the watchful manager.<sup>110</sup> A slumbering customer could also be a potential victim of petty larceny by fellow smokers. For example, in 1932, a certain Chen Quan lost his wallet in a Honam opium house while asleep.<sup>111</sup> Then there was the even more unusual case of the customer who fell asleep after removing his trousers because of the heat and then had the garment stolen from him.<sup>112</sup>

The big opium houses were also victims of sometimes elaborate ploys designed to rob them of their precious equipment, especially pipes of great value.<sup>113</sup> Thus, in 1930 three men devised an ingenious plan to purloin a famous pipe, reputedly worth more than 100 yuan, from an opium house in Honam. Feigning to be customers, the trio entered the house one afternoon. They paid cash in Hong Kong dollars for a large quantity of luxury opium and asked to use the pipe in question. They smoked for a while, and then two accomplices sitting on a neighboring couch started a sham dispute between themselves and came to blows. In the melee, a projectile broke the lamp of the three fake customers, who immediately got into the fight. The two accomplices then fled and were chased by the trio. When the confusion was over, the owner of the establishment realized that his precious pipe had disappeared with the scammers.<sup>114</sup>

That all these manifestations of what can be called “measured” violence appear to be typical of the years in which relative order prevailed does not

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<sup>108</sup> YHB, 9 February 1931, 12 November 1933.

<sup>109</sup> YHB, 15 February 1930, 20 October 1931, 15 February 1932.

<sup>110</sup> YHB, 18 July 1930. Many other examples of such affairs can be found: YHB, 4 March, 8 June, and 16 November 1930.

<sup>111</sup> YHB, 30 October 1931.

<sup>112</sup> YHB, 10 June 1932. Many similar affairs can be found: YHB, 21 April 1936; GMR, 23 June 1924.

<sup>113</sup> *Huazi ribao*, 26 May 1928; YHB, 9 July 1930, 19 December 1934.

<sup>114</sup> YHB, 9 July 1930.



mean that they did not exist in periods of chaos. They actually formed a continuous, light background noise that was subsumed in troubled times by the sounds of more extreme violence that quite naturally grabbed the attention of contemporaries.

This study on the link between the opium houses and violence must be buttressed by analysis from another perspective. Thus, in a given period, the level of violence in the opium houses reflected the general level of violence in the city at large. This finding can also be confirmed in miscellaneous news items in the Canton press on brawls in gambling parlors and teahouses.<sup>115</sup> Christian Henriot, who has studied the brothels of Shanghai for the entire period 1872–1949 from this angle, stresses the fact that these brothels often became places of brawls between customers. Establishments enjoying a certain prestige, for their part, were often victims of theft of precious objects such as jewels, clothing, and again opium pipes.<sup>116</sup> Henriot also concludes more generally that Chinese urban society under the Republic was characterized by a high degree of violence. We can therefore surmise that while the opium houses of Canton were not spared violence, they also were not necessarily more exposed to it than other places of sociability.

And it bears repeating that while it cannot be denied that certain types of opium houses could correspond to the cliché of the gangsters' lair, it would be a major mistake to make generalizations to cover every establishment.

The presence of numerous customers who were not dependent on opium but went to the opium house less to consume opium and more to enjoy the pleasures of the house, especially the company of the *yanhua*, is the most convincing proof that these were generally attractive places.<sup>117</sup> The fact is that fewer people would have visited opium houses if they had been shady places where one's safety was in danger.

#### *The Opium House as a Possible Place of Shame*

Now that the dark legend of the dangerous opium house has been refuted, there remains the question of its "normality." We need to understand the

<sup>115</sup> YHB, 10 and 18 November 1931.

<sup>116</sup> Christian Henriot, "Flowers of Bitterness: Violence and Prostitution in Shanghai, 1872–1949," *Institut d'Asie Orientale note de recherche* 1 (1996): 19–35; Andrew Field has observed the same proliferation of violence in the down-scale dancing rooms of Shanghai: "Dance Hall Culture and Urban Politics in Shanghai, 1927–1954," Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2000, 124–127.

<sup>117</sup> *Lunyu* [Propos] 30 (December 1933): 277; YHB, 21 November 1931, 15 January 1932, 4 February 1932.



extent to which, in general, visiting opium houses was seen as a shameful act when compared with visiting other places of sociability.

Even without the terrifying and biased descriptions of the anti-opium writings, it is legitimate to assert that, unlike the teahouses or even the brothels, opium houses were not considered to be respectable places.

The first hint that these opium houses lacked respectability comes from the fact that, unlike the teahouses and the brothels, and even when their existence was legal, the opium houses were totally absent from the *zhinan* (guides) of Canton during the Republican period.<sup>118</sup> This prompts a comparison with the gambling houses, whose omission in these *zhinan* is because, according to Virgil Ho, the authors did not think it appropriate to mention such places and so encourage people to visit them.<sup>119</sup> The opium houses are also absent from the Canton business yearbook published in 1929.<sup>120</sup> There is not the smallest advertisement for an opium house anywhere in the Canton daily newspapers that I have consulted.<sup>121</sup> It is a fact, though, that in November 1933 the Canton municipality decided to prohibit opium houses from advertising, which tends of course to explain the absence of advertisements but suggests that certain establishments had been resorting to it earlier.<sup>122</sup> There are no publications even partially devoted to the pleasures of opium and opium houses, unlike the case for famous prostitutes for whom there were magazines like *Haizhu xingqi hua-bao* (Haizhu illustrated weekly), *Hudie* (Butterflies), and *Piaopiao* (Waves). It is also known that the courtesans' houses and even the dancing rooms in Shanghai prompted the launching of specialized newspapers.<sup>123</sup>

Yet another clue is that the administrative terms used for the opium houses were models of obscure euphemism, such as *tanhuasuo* (conversation parlors) and *jieyanshi* (addiction-healing rooms). It was the authorities who imposed these terms, as they were not proud that they tolerated these establishments and sought to create the impression that these were temporary places. In any case, this vocabulary contributed in no small measure to the impression that the opium houses were places of shame.

<sup>118</sup> Ci Hangshi, *Guangzhou zhinan*; Guangzhoushi zhengfu, *Guangzhou zhinan*.

<sup>119</sup> Ho, "Selling Smiles," 125.

<sup>120</sup> *Guangzhou shangye minglu* [Canton business yearbook] (Canton: Guangzhou shangye minglushe, 1929). It must be mentioned that, on the contrary, thirteen opium houses are listed in the municipality phone directory in 1936, while brothels and gambling dens did not have this possibility despite the entirely legal nature of their activity (Ho, *Understanding Canton*, 133).

<sup>121</sup> Zhu Qingbao (*Yapian yu jindai Zhongguo*, 81), however, mentions this means of upward mobility for the opium houses, albeit without providing the smallest example.

<sup>122</sup> *Canton Gazette*, 2 November 1923.

<sup>123</sup> Henriot, *Prostitution and Sexuality in Shanghai*, 79–80; Field, "Dance Hall Culture," 169–170.

All these signs of apparent ostracism may reflect only the attitude of the elite and the authorities. But, the names chosen by the owners of the establishments give a better idea of how they might have wished to keep a low profile. As it happened, few of these names had any connection with opium. Even when there was a connection, it was always metaphorical. Certain names thus made reference to smoke, for example, the “Inebriated Cloud” (Zuiyun), “Slumbering Cloud” (Mianyun), and “Purple Cloud” (Xiaji) opium houses.<sup>124</sup> There were also names related to the sounds produced by drawing in smoke, poetically compared with the singing of a bird, as in the opium house called “Oriole’s Song” (Yingge).<sup>125</sup> However, most of the time, the names were built by combining characters of good omen such as *li* (profit), *fu* (happiness), *he* (concord), and *an* (peace), which give no hint as to the nature of the activity. However, one might challenge the notion that this naming was a sign of a reticence specific to these establishments. Indeed, by using neutral terminology, these opium houses did not particularly stand out in the array of businesses: this is clear from the pages of any business yearbook.<sup>126</sup>

However, while their names showed no desire to draw converts, the frontages were sometimes such as to attract the customer with garish colored lighting or impressive *duilian* (parallel sentences) vaunting the quality of the house opium or emphasizing the presence of women serving opium.<sup>127</sup>

The discretion that appeared to surround these houses was therefore ambiguous: the ostentatious nature of certain frontages greatly mitigates the impression of a low profile. It was as though the opium houses wanted to advertise their presence but only within a perimeter, limited strictly to their neighborhood. This was a reflection of an arrangement that met the wishes of the authorities to tolerate opium houses provided that they remained discreet.

The relative discretion of opium houses is not enough to conclude that these places were regarded as shameful by their customers, who would therefore want to visit them in secrecy. When smokers concealed such visits from their families and friends, it was their consumption of opium that

<sup>124</sup> YHB, 18 July 1930, 30 October 1931; Zhonghua guomin juduhui, *Zhongguo yanhuo nianjian*, n.p.

<sup>125</sup> YHB, 15 June 1931.

<sup>126</sup> *Guangzhou shangye minglu*.

<sup>127</sup> See the previous chapter. In 1933, however, the municipality decided to prohibit the opium houses not only from advertising their activities but also from displaying signboards outside their establishments (*Canton Gazette*, 2 November 1923). Given numerous firsthand accounts about the existence of signboards after 1933, it can be assumed that the latter prohibition was widely ignored.

they wished to keep secret, not that they were merely visiting these establishments. Even the anti-opium readers of *Yuehuabao* who were unwillingly taken to these places and recounted all they had seen never mentioned any fear of being spotted in an opium house.<sup>128</sup> This indicates that the opium houses themselves were in no way considered to be shameful places and that it was not compromising to be seen there with a smoker friend.

It would therefore be somewhat bold to claim that these opium places were shrouded in universal infamy. Only the groups most committed to combatting opium consumption seem to have labeled them thus. The rest more probably saw the opium houses, especially the medium and large houses, as fairly ordinary places.

#### *Mr. Chen Visits His Opium House*

The best way to set up the scene of life as it was lived in the opium houses is to describe a visit by an imaginary customer: Mr. Chen visiting a local opium house or perhaps the large room of a luxury opium house.

Mr. Chen generally smokes at the same times every day, usually after lunch and after dinner. He enters the opium house, moving aside the curtains that conceal the seated customers from the gaze of passersby,<sup>129</sup> and goes to the desk at the entrance behind which pipes and opium jars can be seen (plates 8 bottom, 10, 11).<sup>130</sup> He is given his dose in a small jar along with the pipe for which he is responsible until he returns it when leaving.<sup>131</sup> He pays the amount due unless he has an account, which apparently is the case for most habitués.<sup>132</sup>

The staff member who receives him in the room proper assigns him a couch, which he dusts. Then, he lights the lamp placed on the couch.<sup>133</sup> On occasion, especially during peak hours, a customer who comes in alone will share a couch with a perfect stranger.<sup>134</sup> Seated face to face, the two

<sup>128</sup> *YHB*, 7 January, and 2 and 11 February 1932.

<sup>129</sup> *Judu yuekan* 43 (September 1930): 11; *XGR*, 21 January 1935; *Guangzhou zazhi* 11 (15 April 1933): 25; *Zhonghua guomin juduhui, Zhongguo yanhuo nianjian*, illustrations, n.p.

<sup>130</sup> This, at least, was what is extensively seen in the illustrations dating from the late-Qing period: *Dianshizhai huabao*, vol. 1, no. 10, p. 80; vol. 28, no. 1, p. 7; vol. 28, no. 12, p. 85; vol. 29, no. 11, p. 87; vol. 29, no. 9, p. 72; vol. 30, no. 1, p. 8.

<sup>131</sup> *Shehui heimu* [The underside of society] 2 (1933): 5; *YHB*, 20 November 1931. Customers who had their pipes stolen had to compensate the opium house: *YHB*, 27 December 1931.

<sup>132</sup> *YHB*, 29 October 1931, 24 May 1934; *Canton Gazette*, 17 April 1934, 14 March 1936.

<sup>133</sup> *YHB*, 13 December 1931. A little cartoon in the satirical newspaper *Banjiao manhua* (68 [1 October 1932]: 8) shows the hero of its series "Taishi Xiansheng" [Mr. Taishi] in an opium house with bunk beds. This format increased the capacity of opium houses and was also used in the opium house that employed Mrs. X in the mid-1930s (interview with Mrs. X dated 11 July 2006). I have not been able to establish that this practice was very common.

<sup>134</sup> *YHB*, 9 February 1931, 15 November 1933, and 17 November and 14 December 1935.

smokers use the same lamp. This can cause arguments, as happened once with a certain Zhang Zhi who arrived in a state of craving, sat on the same couch as another customer, and lost his temper when the latter did not allow him immediate use of the lamp.<sup>135</sup> However, for smokers of a more peaceful nature, sharing a lamp gives them a chance to get to know each other.<sup>136</sup> If two friends arrive together, they lie face to face. If there are three of them, a pillow is added so that one can be seated at the bottom of the *luohan*, perpendicular to the other two in the arrangement known as *pinzixing* (previously described).<sup>137</sup>

Reclining on a couch, Mr. Chen finds all the necessary paraphernalia are ready: the tray containing the lamp, the needle, and the scraper, as well as a teapot, teacups, and a porcelain pillow on which to rest his head. He prepares his pipe and starts smoking. When he has finished the first dose, he can order more.<sup>138</sup> (Sometimes customers take advantage of their reclining position to doze off after smoking.<sup>139</sup> At peak hours, however, this possibility may be restricted, though very probably only in the lower-class opium houses.<sup>140</sup>) If there are few people in the establishment, Mr. Chen can also interrupt his session to go out on some other business and then return and finish his opium.<sup>141</sup> When he leaves once and for all, he returns his pipe to the desk.

One might wonder what sort of atmosphere prevails in the opium house when Mr. Chen is seated and smoking his opium.

The first characteristic feature of an opium house is the smoke itself. It is rare for a description not to mention the presence of dense smoke with an odor of its own that does not appear to bother the patrons in the least.<sup>142</sup> Nor are Mr. Chen and his neighbors disturbed by a second aspect that cannot be dissociated from the general atmosphere and that impresses newcomers recounting their first visit—the noise. Even the eyewitness reports about the luxury houses mention the noise.<sup>143</sup> We can imagine that noise was a constant, except for those who could shut themselves away in private rooms. This was not necessarily as unpleasant to the smoker as it

<sup>135</sup> YHB, 14 December 1935.

<sup>136</sup> YHB, 21 February and 17 November 1935.

<sup>137</sup> *Shangqi huabao* [Tasting strange things] 3 (1906): 2b; *Judu yuekan* 90 (June 1935): 5.

<sup>138</sup> YHB, 9 February 1931, 17 June 1932.

<sup>139</sup> Interview with Mrs. X dated 11 July 2006; YHB, 30 October 1931, 21 April 1936; GMR, 23 June 1924.

<sup>140</sup> YHB, 10 May 1930, 27 December 1931, 4 February 1934.

<sup>141</sup> YHB, 15 November 1933.

<sup>142</sup> YHB, 15 January and 2 February 1932; XGR, 17 June 1935; Nishi Seiun, *Kanton hyakudai* [One hundred questions about Canton] (Tokyo: Fuzanbō, 1940): 56.

<sup>143</sup> *Yugong sanrikan* 35 (ca. 1930); XGR, 17 June 1935; YHB, 5 June 1931, 7 January and 2 February 1932.

would be to a Western observer: peace and calm in public places are not valued in the same way in China. On the contrary, the term *renao* has positive connotations and designates, for example, an atmosphere that is both lively and noisy, one being inseparable from the other.

Besides, the denunciations of anti-opium witnesses are directed not so much against the general sound level as against certain specific noises, as can be seen from this passage:

The smokers lie reclining in every direction, mingled together and making loud inhaling noises. Those who are already under the effect of opium sit alongside their beds, speaking of strange things and pouring out incoherent speech. [One gets] an irritated throat, the ears are filled with noise, [and for company one has] people who make a spectacle of themselves.<sup>144</sup>

The noises that offended the writer were therefore first of all the “tut, tut” sound of air being drawn in through the bowl.<sup>145</sup> The even more characteristic “incoherent speech” was in fact, very probably, jargon-filled conversation about the drug itself. Other firsthand reports mention scandalous noises such as the high-pitched voices of the *yanhua* simpering with their customers.<sup>146</sup>

One might wonder at the apparent contradiction between the noisy atmosphere and some smokers falling asleep after taking opium. The fact is that, as with smell, the noise tolerance threshold is very much the product of a defined social and historical context.<sup>147</sup> While it might seem unpleasant today to take a nap in noisy surroundings, the same sonic environment could have been quite tolerable and even pleasant to an inhabitant of Canton in 1930.

If the quoted passage is viewed independently of the general value judgments that it conveys, the noisy conversation that it recounts actually points to the convivial atmosphere that prevailed among smokers come to chat among friends. Illustrations from the late Qing presenting the interiors of some opium houses depict a considerable proportion of customers chatting with one another while seated on the edge of their bed or standing, sometimes smoking a water pipe. There can be no doubt that people who spent time in this way thought opium houses to be pleasant places where they could meet friends and spend leisure time together. Some firsthand accounts transcended the dark legend of the opium houses,

<sup>144</sup> YHB, 7 January 1932.

<sup>145</sup> YHB, 2 February 1932.

<sup>146</sup> YHB, 15 January 1932.

<sup>147</sup> Alain Corbin, *Le maison et la jonquille* (Paris: Aubier, 1982), 68–72.

describing a space where people could go to chat pleasantly, exchanging gossip and news.<sup>148</sup>

We can also see that the opium house was inserted into the structures of sociability that were external to itself, such as life in the neighborhood. The sources also sometimes mention an opium house that was visited specifically by members of certain professions: for example, an opium house could be a gathering place for opera actors, a profession in which opium consumption was part of the definition of a collective identity.<sup>149</sup>

The question of space was also important to explain the attraction of the opium houses. During the Belle Époque, in France, workers would rather go to the cabaret after work than stay in their tiny, damp, and poorly aired homes. It was there that the worker would find light, heat, and company.<sup>150</sup> In Canton too, the private domestic space for the large majority of the population was tiny. A comparative inquiry on the budget structure of workers' households, made in about fifteen Chinese cities in 1930, suggests that the problem of housing was particularly acute in Canton and that households in the city devoted more than 20% of their budget on rent as against 10.8% for the total number of persons surveyed.<sup>151</sup>

Smokers would therefore go to opium houses to escape the discomfort and smallness of their homes. The reclining position, it must be stressed, was particularly suited to a rest period or even a small nap on a very busy day. Here was a pleasure that no other leisure space could provide to its customers. Comfortably in place, the smoker could be at ease and take his shoes off. In very hot weather, customers would even sit bare-chested,<sup>152</sup> a condition wrongly described as that of someone in a state of self-forgetfulness. Ouyang Shan compares a customer reclining on a couch to a pig's half carcass lying on a butcher's slab.<sup>153</sup> In fact, this position was not limited to the opium houses; it could also be seen at the same period in the teahouses of Chengdu.<sup>154</sup>

The local opium houses were also appreciated by the poorest consumers because social cleavages were somewhat put aside in these places. For a brief spell, the impoverished Canton dweller had a sense of getting away from his condition, not only by escaping into an artificial haven but also

<sup>148</sup> *Renjianshi* 38 (20 October 1935): 19–21.

<sup>149</sup> YHB, 25 May 1934.

<sup>150</sup> Nourrisson, *Le buveur du XIXe siècle*, 125–126.

<sup>151</sup> H. D. Lamson, *Social Pathologies in China* (1935; Taipei: Ch'eng Wen, 1974), 45.

<sup>152</sup> *Minguo ribao*, 27 July 1931.

<sup>153</sup> Ouyang Shan, "Dutu" [The gambler], in *Ouyang Shan wenji*, 2:661. This news item was published in 1937.

<sup>154</sup> Wang Di, "Ershi shijichu de chaguan," 45.

because here he was served instead of serving and gave orders instead of obeying. This dimension cannot be overlooked, and one might borrow an expression from Didier Nourrisson referring to rural taverns in nineteenth-century France: "in these places he [the agricultural worker] would drink wine, brandy, or liqueurs and above all get a sense of his dignity."<sup>155</sup>

Opium consumption, the original purpose of the Canton opium houses, was only one of their activities. Other pastimes, such as games of chance (in Honam), could also occupy customers.<sup>156</sup> The managers had a vested interest in making sure that their customers would get as much pleasure and recreation as possible in visiting their establishments. They therefore competed to come up with ideas. Resorting to *yanhua* was only one way to attract customers. In 1935, the owners of the local opium houses in Guchan brought in opera singers, storytellers, and similar distractions (the newspaper article does not specify which).<sup>157</sup> Another way to draw customers was to organize a free lottery. One manager would place a number of small objects near the cash desk, attaching a number to each of them. Each customer who took more than 6 *jiao* worth of opium could draw a number and if it corresponded to the object on display he could take it away.<sup>158</sup>

The case of Canton therefore shows that the opium houses deserve to be counted among the places of sociability in Chinese cities. The adversaries of opium were probably right to explain the large numbers that frequented the opium houses by the fact that these places were among the few leisure spaces accessible to the population, along with brothels and gambling rooms.<sup>159</sup> Even if we cannot compare the atmosphere in these places with the intense social life that went on, for example, in the teahouses of Chengdu,<sup>160</sup> the majority of these opium houses were lively places where people took pleasure in whiling away their time. They might even be compared with the Turkish baths in sixteenth-century Istanbul. The function of the Turkish baths in social life was by no means limited to their primary vocation because they were also places of sociability where people went to meet friends to chat and drink tea or coffee.<sup>161</sup>

<sup>155</sup> Nourrisson, *Le buveur du XIXe siècle*, 102.

<sup>156</sup> YHB, 4 March 1930, 26 October 1931, 5 November 1936. In Ouyang Shan's novels, the opium house serving the theater was equipped with gaming tables ("Dutu," 667–669; "Pigun shijie," 1:375).

<sup>157</sup> YHB, 5 November 1935.

<sup>158</sup> YHB, 21 November 1931. Other references can be found to lotteries set up in the opium houses (YHB, 9 February and 5 November 1936).

<sup>159</sup> *Judu yuekan* 23 (July 1928): 48; GDJYJK, *fulu*, 2.

<sup>160</sup> Wang Di, *Ershi shijichu de chaguan*, 45–48.

<sup>161</sup> Robert Mantran, *La vie quotidienne à Istanbul au siècle de Soliman le Magnifique* [Daily life in Istanbul in the century of Suleiman the Magnificent], 2nd ed., rev. (Paris: Hachette, 1990).



The phrase “place of sociability” is so much in fashion that it risks being misused and therefore must be understood in all its implications: by offering a place for meeting and exchanges between smokers (all the better appreciated as they were all victims of fairly widespread social disapproval), the opium house must be seen as a highly strategic venue. The opium house allowed the transmission of a value system held by the smokers (as will be seen in the next chapter) and supported its permanence. By coming together, smokers could become aware of their existence as a social group and therefore be psychologically more capable of withstanding the considerable pressure exerted on them by the omnipresent anti-opium propaganda.

### *The Staff*

Sociability in the opium houses was the product of interaction among customers but also, obviously, brought the staff into play. This is especially true as some members of the staff were there chiefly to keep company with the customers. Any description of life in the opium houses must take into account the staff that worked there.

### The Owners and Managers

In the low-level opium houses, it seems that managers and proprietors were the same individuals. This was not necessarily the case in the luxury opium houses. The term *laoban*, which is most often seen in the sources, does not make any clear distinction between the simple manager and an individual running his own business. It is clear however that the bigger opium houses had staff in sufficient numbers to allow the *laoban* to focus on managing the place while supervising the financial aspect.

Things were obviously different with the smaller establishments, where the manager kept direct contact with the customers. This role cannot be studied without mentioning Ouyang Shan's horrific portrait of Xian Xiang, the opium-house owner who appears in two of his novels.<sup>162</sup> Xian Xiang is a former criminal who had killed a man fifteen years earlier and is also an inveterate gambler. This individual rules his opium house with an iron fist. Ouyang depicts his psychology and the entire working of the opium house using a rather clever and classical device: he describes the initiation of a newly recruited employee, Wang Xiaocun (who is also the hero in two of his stories). Xian Xiang teaches Wang to disregard every scruple and especially repress any compassion toward customers. This portrait highlights the strong hand needed by anyone managing an

<sup>162</sup> These are “Pigun shijie” [A world of rogues] and “Dutu” in *Ouyang shan wenji*, 1:362–377, 2:660–669.



establishment of ill repute. It was a clear part of Ouyang's design to draw up a terrifying picture of the opium houses. All the same, even if every opium house had to take precautions against theft and display firmness in many circumstances,<sup>163</sup> this in no way implies that all owners of opium houses were criminals.

However, information about the owners and managers of the opium houses is so scanty that these persons will have to remain in the shadows. There were also women who ran opium houses, but they were very few and very much in the minority.<sup>164</sup>

### The Employees

Leaving aside the hostesses, the *yanhua*, it is hardly easy to distinguish between the different categories of employees. The presence of ten-year-old girls and boys, unpaid but given food and accommodation and entrusted with housework, has been attested by one such person who was in these houses in the 1930s.<sup>165</sup> These children are never mentioned in the written sources. The adult staff included employees whose specific tasks are not easy to identify. The terminology is not very precise. The sources most often speak of *qintong*, but also at times mention *dianban*, or *huoban*. It is difficult to determine whether this diversity of names corresponded to real differences in function. In the smaller opium houses there were probably all-purpose waiters who would lead customers to their couches, bring them the necessary paraphernalia, clean the equipment after use, and also serve tea and boil opium when necessary. Late-Qing illustrations that offer representations of the interiors of the Shanghai opium houses show employees at work, often with kettle in hand, filling the customers' teapots (plate 8)<sup>166</sup> Another of their functions was to make sure that the customers did not steal any equipment.

Certain big opium houses however had more staff and a clear-cut division of labor, for example with an accountant or a cook.<sup>167</sup>

When the opium house shut down for the night, employees would sometimes sleep on the premises to discourage thieves. There could be up to five of them in houses that had expensive equipment. These employees had special permits with photographs to prove, if ever there was an

<sup>163</sup> There is the extreme case of an owner who actually tortured one of his customers whom he suspected of theft: YHB, 20 November 1931.

<sup>164</sup> YHB, 24 August 1931; *Canton Gazette*, 17 April 1934, 14 March 1936.

<sup>165</sup> Interview with Mrs. X on 11 July 2006.

<sup>166</sup> *Dianshizhai huobao*, vol. 16, no. 4, p. 32; vol. 28, no. 1, p. 7; YHB, 8 June 1930.

<sup>167</sup> YHB, 3 December 1931, 27 April and 22 June 1933.

inspection, that they were not customers and were therefore allowed to sleep on the premises.<sup>168</sup>

Women too could be employed in the opium houses, but they had different tasks: they were hostesses specifically responsible for receiving (*zhaodai*) customers, keeping them company, and preparing their opium pipes. They were known as *yanhua*, flowers of smoke.

### The Yanhua

Employing women to receive and serve customers was not specific to the opium houses: gambling houses and teahouses did the same.<sup>169</sup>

*Yanhua* were present as soon as the Canton opium houses reemerged in the 1923–1925 period. This is attested to by a prohibition published in July 1924. However, the specific term *yanhua* did not appear in the 1920s: women who dealt with customers were called *nüzhadai* (women responsible for welcoming and entertaining customers).<sup>170</sup> In a short story written by Zhang Ziping during the second half of 1924, one of the main characters is a young woman who prepares opium pellets for customers in an opium house and keeps them company. However, the term *yanhua* does not appear in this story.<sup>171</sup> The first known occurrence of the term *yanhua* dates from 12 March 1930, when it was used with an explanation of its meaning.<sup>172</sup> This new word soon gained currency, and the word *nüzhadai* thereafter designated only restaurant and teahouse hostesses.

In the years that followed, a number of prohibitory regulations were laid down in the name of morality.<sup>173</sup> However, these did not last, and *yanhua* very quickly reappeared each time.<sup>174</sup> As a reader of the *Yuehuabao* put it, citing two celebrated verses by the poet Bai Juyi (772–846): “fire cannot destroy wild grass; it is reborn with the first breath of the spring wind.”<sup>175</sup>

A change could be seen however during the first two months of 1932. At this time, passions were aroused over the banning of the *yanhua*, who

<sup>168</sup> YHB, 20 November 1932, 16 November, 25 March, and 19 December 1934.

<sup>169</sup> *Wuxian manhua* 2, no. 3 (12 December 1930): 5; *Judu yuekan* 91 (August 1935): 20–21; YHB, 21 August 1933, 18 January 1934; Zhou Kaiqing, *Jinri zhi Huanan*, 71–74.

<sup>170</sup> *Shenbao*, 23 May 1923; GMR, 12 July 1924, 16 May 1925.

<sup>171</sup> Zhang Ziping, “Gongzhai weiyuan” [The commissioner of the public debt], in *Zhang Ziping xiaoshuo* (Guangzhou: Huacheng chubanshe, 1994), vol. 2, pp. 387–446.

<sup>172</sup> YHB, 12 March 1930.

<sup>173</sup> *Canton Gazette*, 22 July 1924; GMR, 28 July 1924; YHB, 24 March and 30 May 1930, 18 and 21 November 1931; Canton Municipal Archives, series no. 570, *Guangzhoushi shizheng gongbao*, November 1930.

<sup>174</sup> *Yugong sanrikan* 31 (ca. 1930); *Huazi ribao*, 18 March 1931; YHB, 11 December 1931, 10 January and 4 February 1932.

<sup>175</sup> YHB, 2 February 1932. The same quotation is used in other articles on this subject: YHB, 17 April and 27 July 1934.

were the target of a press campaign. Many articles contained narratives about the scandalous lives of *yanhua* and generally concluded with an indignant paragraph emphasizing that the *yanhua* led many to turn to opium and insisting on the need to put an end to the presence of these women in the opium houses.<sup>176</sup> An example of this kind of prose follows:

Ultimately, the *yanhua* are a serious menace to morality and cause many problems. This is especially true for hot-blooded youth and students who leave their classes to spend time in the opium houses and covet the *yanhua*. Many of them became drug addicts in this way. This is very regrettable, and it must be hoped that there will be a genuine and strict prohibition of [the *yanhua*] that prevents them from returning in some other guise. This would be of inestimable benefit for youth!<sup>177</sup>

The campaign was a success because by March 1932, it led to the general prohibition of all women, whether customers or staff, from entering the opium houses.<sup>178</sup> Unlike previous bans, this one was strictly applied in subsequent years, as we have seen.<sup>179</sup> There were signs of relaxation around 1934 and 1935, but there was no massive or conspicuous return of the *yanhua*. The reports in the newspapers and journals appear to be contradictory: in the same period, they reported, on the one hand, arrests of women surprised and questioned in the opium houses,<sup>180</sup> and, on the other hand, the open presence of customers and *yanhua* in certain upscale establishments.<sup>181</sup> This somewhat confused situation, which cannot be compared to a massive return of the *yanhua*, continued up until the end of the period under study.

*Life Histories of the Yanhua* Articles charting the life of a *yanhua* are fairly numerous and give a good idea of their personal histories. *Yanhua* of working age were generally very young, most aged between fifteen and twenty-two, although a talent for preparing opium pipes could earn one a considerably lengthier career.<sup>182</sup> Whereas some of them had been sold by

<sup>176</sup> YHB, 7, 10, 12, and 15 January 1932, and 2, 4, and 11 February 1932.

<sup>177</sup> YHB, 15 January 1932.

<sup>178</sup> YHB, 22 March 1932.

<sup>179</sup> This was accompanied by the dismissal of certain police commissioners guilty of laxity in this area, a fate that must have prompted zeal among their colleagues who had kept their jobs (YHB, 22 March 1932).

<sup>180</sup> YHB, 17 January, 9 March, and 22 November 1934, 24 November 1935.

<sup>181</sup> Two articles in *Judu yuekan* (79 [ca. 1934]: 31, and 90 [June 1935]: 5–7) mention the presence of numerous women as customers and as *yanhua* in Canton's luxury opium houses. Zhou Kaiqing (*Jinri zhi Huanan*, 71–74) confirms the presence of waitresses but only in the upscale opium houses.

<sup>182</sup> The sources also mention *yanhua* aged twenty-nine and even thirty-eight: YHB,

their families to the opium houses, the very large majority of the *yanhua* were free wage earners.<sup>183</sup>

The social origin of the young women who practiced the *yanhua*'s trade is often mentioned. Certain articles explain the conscious choice made by young women from well-to-do families to join the *yanhua* profession as the result of a misinterpretation of the concept of liberty (*wujie ziyou*), in which they laid claim to a sentimental life independent of any established family framework.<sup>184</sup> However, while a few cases of the downfall of girls from good families made for the delectation of the newspaper chroniclers, the *yanhua* generally came from the poorer sections.<sup>185</sup> many articles speak of girls pushed into becoming *yanhua* by material necessity.<sup>186</sup>

It is not relevant to see any opposition between *yanhua* from wealthy families who chose the trade in order to flout irksome social norms and impoverished girls pushed into the trade by necessity. Certain histories of *yanhua* from poor families show that they too made a similar break with the values commonly accepted in their original background and especially with the traditional view of women. The *yanhua*'s trade was associated with elegant garb, and its rewards were interesting. It also entailed no physical hardship despite fairly lengthy working days. While the articles waxed indignant about the so-called libidinal tendencies of some of these young women from poor families, it would be probably more credible to emphasize their aspiration for financial independence, a freer life, and a more comfortable one than that of a worker's wife.<sup>187</sup>

Besides, the *yanhua* profession gave young women, especially those who worked in high-quality opium houses, the opportunity to become concubines of wealthy habitués, exactly like the prostitutes in the luxury brothels.<sup>188</sup> An exemplary life history of a successful *yanhua* is that of the young He Zhen who worked as a prostitute in a Honam hamlet, Chencun, in the 1930s. She married a merchant, but very soon his business failed because of his opium addiction. As the household fell into extreme poverty, toward which the husband showed total apathy, she managed to convince him to let her work as a *yanhua* in a big opium house. There, her attractive features and seductive wiles soon made her famous. For a while, she

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15 February 1930, 20 October 1931.

<sup>183</sup> YHB, 10 January 1932, 28 November 1933.

<sup>184</sup> YHB, 11 February 1932, 5 March 1934.

<sup>185</sup> YHB, 10 January 1932, 31 December 1931, 9 February 1932, 6 January 1934. According to Mrs. X, the *yanhua* working in the opium house where she herself was employed all came from poor families (interview with Mrs. X dated 11 July 2006).

<sup>186</sup> YHB, 10 January, 9 February, and 1 May 1932.

<sup>187</sup> YHB, 26 October and 20 December 1931.

<sup>188</sup> Hu Puan, *Zhonghua quanguo fengsu zhi*, 4:9; *Huazi ribao*, 9 August 1929.

supported her husband with her earnings. Then, as soon as her newfound prestige allowed it, she became the concubine of a very wealthy man who purchased her freedom from the husband. The significance of this story is that it is about a young woman facing a difficult situation in her project of upward social mobility yet consciously using the *yanhua* trade to derive advantage from her beauty and find a place in a wealthy family.<sup>189</sup> While journalists were fond of reporting these success stories, the scale of the phenomenon is difficult to assess.

*Prostitutes or Face Dealers* Many press articles speak of the indecent attitude of the *yanhua*. Some even compare them explicitly to prostitutes (*changji*), a comparison suggested by the very term “smoke flower.”<sup>190</sup> As in the story of He Zhe, the histories of the *yanhua* effectively refer to their lives as prostitutes before or after they became *yanhua*.<sup>191</sup> In certain circumstances, events involving larger groups suggest a porous wall between the two conditions. Thus, after the prohibition of March 1932, a number of *yanhua* reduced to unemployment joined the ranks of the *yehua*, the name by which clandestine prostitutes were known in Canton.<sup>192</sup>

However, rare are the articles that unambiguously speak of sexual relations between a *yanhua* and a customer.<sup>193</sup> Most, whether they refer to the *yanhua* in general or to one in particular, use vague expressions such as “*canggounawu*” (serving as a smoke screen for vice).<sup>194</sup> We cannot rule out some self-censorship by journalists for the sake of decency and decorum, but in the face of these accusations we need to be wary of making any hasty judgments. Confronted with documents containing more or less explicit allusions to flirtatious relationships, certain historians view the *yanhua* phenomenon systematically as a form of disguised prostitution.<sup>195</sup> These accusations of “indecentcy” need to be resituated in the context of Canton in the first half of the 1930s, a period marked by official campaigns for strict segregation of the sexes in public places and also against female clothing deemed to be too revealing.<sup>196</sup> This very unpermissive climate put

<sup>189</sup> YHB, 5 August 1931.

<sup>190</sup> YHB, 27 July 1934.

<sup>191</sup> YHB, 26 October 1931, 2 and 9 February 1932, 5 March 1934, 5 August 1931, 20 December 1931, 11 June 1932, 5 March 1934.

<sup>192</sup> YHB, 22 June and 17 November 1932.

<sup>193</sup> YHB, 9 February 1931, 7 September 1933, 27 July 1934.

<sup>194</sup> YHB, 30 May 1930, 12 January, 4 February, and 17 November 1932.

<sup>195</sup> Zhu Qingbao (*Yapian yu jindai Zhongguo*, 81–82) quite purely and simply likens the Cantonese *yanhua* to prostitutes. In one *wenshizilao*, Liang Guowu has the same attitude: “Wu Tiecheng tongzhi Guangdong shiqi ‘jinyan’ heimu,” 133.

<sup>196</sup> *Lunyu* 46 (August 1934): 1016, 1052; 64 (May 1935): 815–816; 74 (November 1935): 214–215; *Revue nationale chinoise*, October 1935.

the *yanhua* question in a very sensitive light. Fairly innocent attitudes that promoted relatively free mixing between the sexes could then easily fall into the “indecent” category.

A comparison needs to be made here between the *yanhua* and the hostesses of Shanghai’s dancing halls. The latter were young women who would be hired by customers for a dance, and their activity too was stigmatized because it led to close contact with men. The dancing halls are often over hastily described as places of disguised prostitution. However, Andrew Field has convincingly shown in his Ph.D. dissertation that very few hostesses actually practiced prostitution in the 1930s simply because they could earn a good living by dancing. This does not rule out the idea that a hostess might occasionally decide to bestow her favors on a man of her choosing inasmuch as she felt free to conduct her private life as she wished. Those hostesses who regularly slept with their customers were often prostitutes come in search of customers who had deserted the brothels where the regulations were excessively strict.<sup>197</sup>

Like the dancers, most of the *yanhua* in the mid-range opium houses could earn a decent living without resorting to prostitution.<sup>198</sup> In the high-class opium houses, *yanhua* who achieved celebrity could become both trophy and referee in the rivalry for prestige among wealthy Cantonese. Such women could even earn large sums of money in very short periods of time through presents and tips.

It would be overly simplistic to imagine that the *yanhua* as a group suffered opprobrium purely because of misbehavior by some of them. Every one of these women would recline beside men in a true state of free interaction between the sexes: this was where the scandal lay. It was akin to the entwined bodies of a dancing hostess and her customer. Whether it was on the dance floor or in the opium house, it was this proximity of two bodies of the opposite sex that thoroughly flouted the Confucian precept that “men and women should remain at a distance from each other” (*nannii shoushou buqin*). Herein lay the heart of the problem.

There are therefore two ways to understand the succession of regulations banning the *yanhua*: the first approach, which is actually a sterile one, would look at the tiresome repetition of prohibitory regulations and conclude that they most often remained a dead letter. Another more interesting and fruitful explanation would be that this recurrence of prohibitions resulted from the action of two contrary forces: a centripetal force pulling the *yanhua* into the opium houses (a force that emanated from desires of the customers, the owners, and these women themselves), and a

<sup>197</sup> Field, “Dance Hall Culture,” 67–72; Henriot, *Prostitution and Sexuality in Shanghai*, 127.

<sup>198</sup> *Yugong sanrikan* 53 (ca. 1930); *YHB*, 10 January 1932.

centrifugal force impelled by authorities acting under the influence of a supposedly progressive ideology that sought to remove women to a distance. This expulsion however was related less to the opium houses themselves than to a position on a piece of furniture deemed to be even more scandalous: the *luohan*.

The prohibitions were actually followed not by the (even temporary) disappearance of the *yanhua*, but rather by a migration—either into geographical areas where the police were less active or, more subtly, in the same house but “out of the bed,” implying a modification of their job description. Thus, a prohibition would lead to the invention of various fictions. The *yanhua* managed to remain in the opium houses by converting themselves into fruit vendors.<sup>199</sup> Exile could also take them up to the threshold of the opium house, where they would set up stalls as fruit or cigarette vendors.<sup>200</sup>

The centrifugal force acted in impulses or short bursts. The centripetal force, on the contrary, was constant. It gradually and unfailingly drew the *yanhua* back toward the couch. The impetus for their return to their natural function probably stemmed from the experience of the opium houses on the periphery. Here, the will of the authorities would be tested and then, if they did not react, the practice would very quickly return in a big way.<sup>201</sup>

The apparent laxness of the authorities toward the *yanhua* up to 1932 and even beyond can be interpreted in another way. While the authorities turned a blind eye to compromises (such as the conversion of the *yanhua* into fruit vendors), it was perhaps not so much that they were powerless as that the main point was to remove the women from their reclining position beside male clients. The presence of these women in the opium houses as such was far less of an issue even if, in literal terms, it was the subject of the regulations.

Thus, while it would be absurd to deny that certain *yanhua* did make commercial use of their bodies, one should perhaps give credence to a

<sup>199</sup> *Yugong sanrikan* 31 (ca. 1930); *YHB*, 24 March, 30 May, and 10 June 1930, 24 August and 27 December 1931, and 4 February 1932.

<sup>200</sup> *YHB*, 10 January and 22 June 1932.

<sup>201</sup> An article in *Yuehuabao* dated 29 November 1934 describes this process of re-colonization by the *yanhua* of the opium houses located around the city in Fengcheng. The situation was exactly the same for the teahouses in 1928, when waitresses reappeared at the periphery of the city in modest-sized establishments. These tentative attempts were made by establishments trying their luck, through this innovation, in order to siphon off a part of the clientele of the downtown teahouses. As this initiative drew no official reaction, the downtown teahouses ventured into risky terrain in order to stop their own customers from moving toward establishments on the periphery. As a result, after some weeks, the *chahua* returned in force (*Haizhu xingqi huabao* 8 [1928]: 9).



witness familiar with the opium houses who asserted that such was not the case for the large majority of them.<sup>202</sup>

More light can be shed on the undisputed success of the *yanhua* by reformulating the question and asking why customers were willing to pay to be served by a *yanhua*. A customer who came into an opium house and was immediately served by a young and seductive *yanhua* reclining before him and carefully preparing opium pipes in his place obtained, in terms of comfort, all that he was willing to spend by way of tips. Pleasure is therefore the most obvious explanation and to a great extent answers the question.

However, an article in the *Yuehuabao* dated 15 January 1932 reveals another essential function of these women: a *yanhua* named Youbao was taking care of a habitual and wealthy customer, a certain Liu, in a private room in a luxurious house when Chen, another frequent user of her services, came in with a friend on his first visit to this place. Chen was used to having Youbao rush to welcome him, present him with a pipe, dust his couch, and prepare his opium pellets, so he was disagreeably surprised to find that she was not there to welcome him this time. Even worse, he had to stand and wait with his friend in the hall on the ground floor as the other *yanhua* dared not approach a man known to be Youbao's regular customer. As he waited to be served and saw that every other customer was surrounded by *yanhua*, Chen began to get angry. Besides, he had hoped to show his friend that he was an important customer. Chen ended up shouting for Youbao. Liu however did not wish to be abandoned for the sake of a rival and would not let Youbao go. The two men finally came to blows.<sup>203</sup>

This is an eloquent story since the *yanhua* was there above all to clearly mark the customer's rank and status. Chen got into a situation where he had to find a way to save face. This need was all the greater as he had hoped to impress his friend. Each customer felt that he had paid enough to be given a preferred status. What might be aptly called a "face-to-face" encounter inevitably led to a confrontation. Any romantic sentiment they might have entertained was only an additional spur to actions dictated by face-saving and prestige-winning strategies. Outbursts of emotion no less than of sexual desire should not conceal the fact that one reason for the existence of the *yanhua*, perhaps even the main reason, was what might be called the business of the trophy trader, or even "face trading."

Another look needs to be taken at the way in which the *yanhua*'s job description differed from those of other staff in the opium houses.

<sup>202</sup> Interview with Madame Mai Zhaoshen dated 15 July 2008.

<sup>203</sup> An almost exactly similar story is narrated in the *Guangzhou minguo ribao* dated 16 May 1924.



Interestingly, *yanhua* were specialists in accessory services. The services that they provided, preparing pipes (which the consumers could easily have done themselves) and meeting customers but also selling fruit and cigarettes, clearly added to the simple, basic services on offer. The care with which they dressed similarly displayed the rank of anyone prepared to treat himself to their services.<sup>204</sup> At the opposite end of the scale, it was the *qintong* who were responsible for distributing and collecting pipes, cleaning bowls, allocating couches, collecting cash, distributing tea, and performing all those little jobs that were part of the minimum service. Anyone who asked for a *yanhua* to do these tasks immediately raised himself above the status of the basic customer.

\* \* \*

Having disappeared—with the exception of the clandestine establishments—during the period dominated by anti-opium policies (1906–1923), the opium houses reappeared in Canton but under restrictive regulations. The authorities took care to limit the “visibility” of these places, and set up controls over visitors, but also drew the maximum amount of revenue. The owners of the opium houses were therefore subjected to a multitude of taxes and controls over their operations that were enforced even more strictly in the 1930s.

The services offered by the opium houses in Canton were certainly diverse. The myth of the opium house as a filthy, disreputable den does not correspond to reality except at the lowest fringes, in the *yantiao* dens with very basic amenities and minimal service. In the big luxury opium houses, on the contrary, the staff would be ever eager to provide a multitude of services in superbly appointed surroundings. These two types of opium houses furnished the essential material for the descriptions made by contemporaries. The ordinary neighborhood opium houses that complemented the range of establishments appear nowhere except in news items, although there were large numbers of them.

In chapter 4, we saw that the narratives of the opium haters do not describe any general penetration of opium into the city itself (that is, into homes, gambling houses, hotels, and so on) and that they always focus their attacks on the opium houses. In condemning these establishments they were actually not mistaking their target. The fact is that, far from being dangerous lairs of brigands and far from being limited to their primary purpose of providing a place and the necessary equipment for the consumption of opium, the opium houses were generally also genuine places of sociability.

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<sup>204</sup> YHB, 18 November and 11 December 1931.

It is with good reason that the authorities saw the opium house as the major point for proselytism by the community of opium smokers, a place to beguile and induct new members into their midst. The luxury to be found in the most attractive opium houses was an obvious danger. However, even the simplest opium houses fitted perfectly well into local life and into the structures of social life external to themselves. Thus, a person not used to opium could easily be led to take his first pipe just to keep company with his friends.

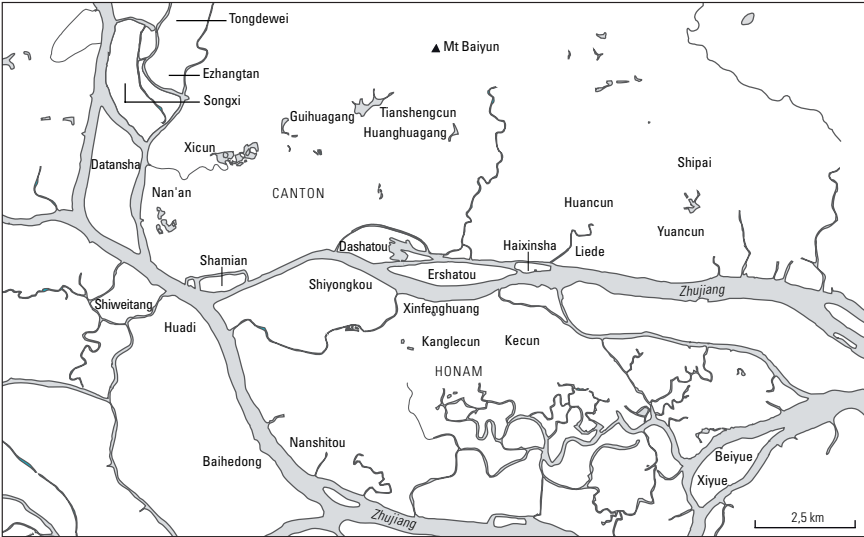
The problem of the *yanhua* gave concrete shape to this dialectic between seduction and contagion. Taking advantage of the close physical proximity between persons of opposite sexes permitted by the opium houses, they used their charms to draw people foreign to the world of opium. The *yanhua* thus dangerously challenged the barriers with which the enemies of opium tried, as will be seen, to segregate the group of smokers.



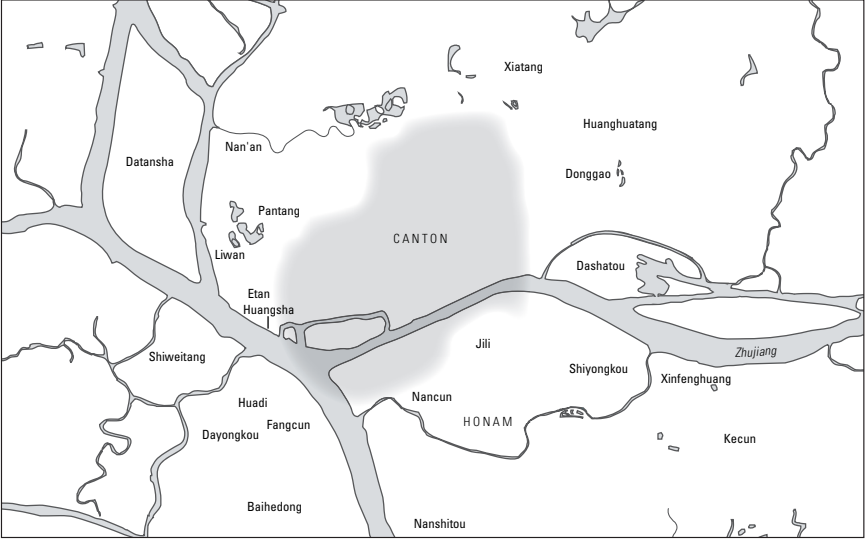
Map 1. Southern China and bordering countries at the beginning of the Republican period.



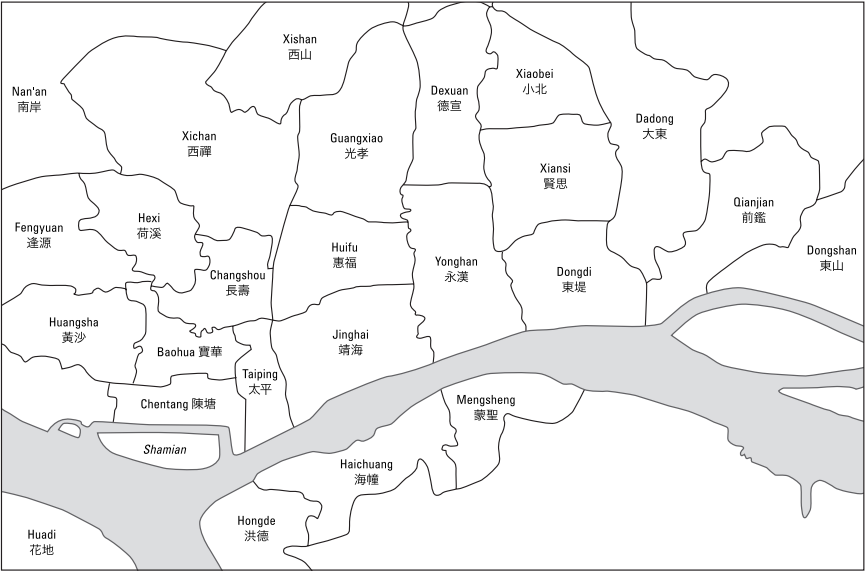
Map 2. Canton in 1930. *Source:* BNF, Department of Maps and Plans, Ge B 8248.



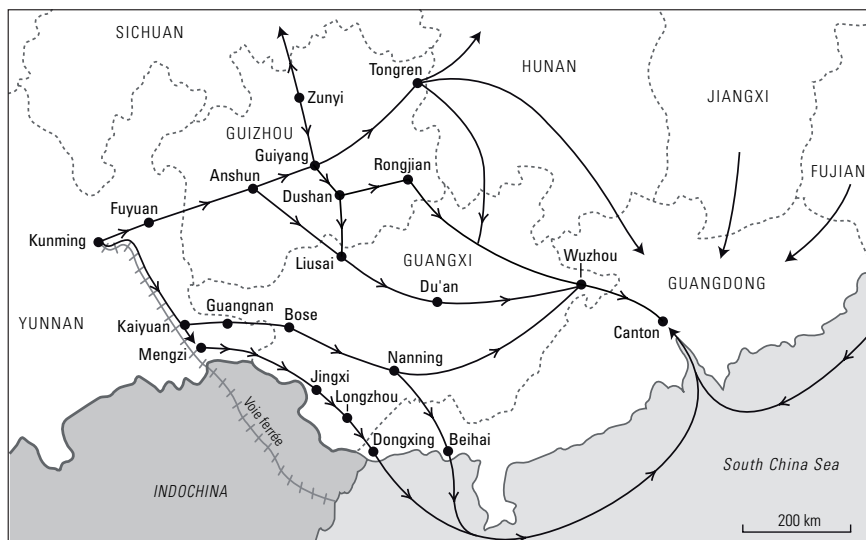
Map 3. The outskirts of Canton.



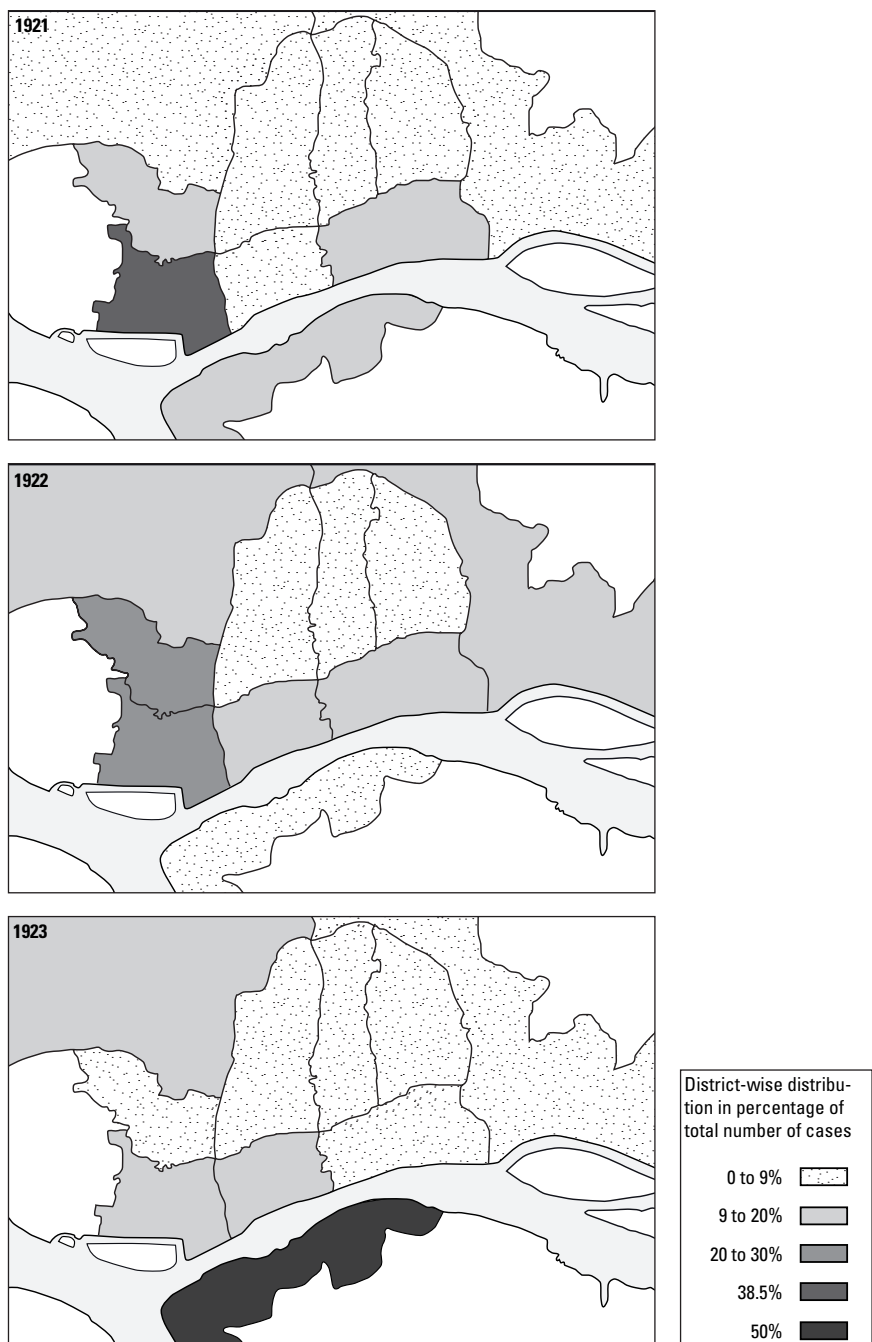
Map 4. The Canton conurbation and its periphery around 1930.



Map 5. Canton's districts (1929-1936).

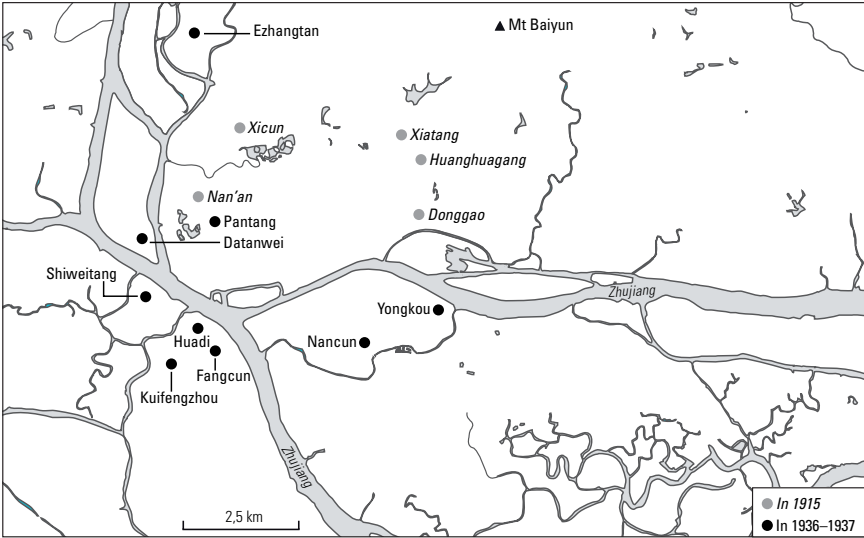


Map 6. The circuits of raw opium procurement through Guizhou, Yunnan, Guangxi, and Guangdong (1915–1936). Source: Slack, *Opium, State, and Society*, p. 26.

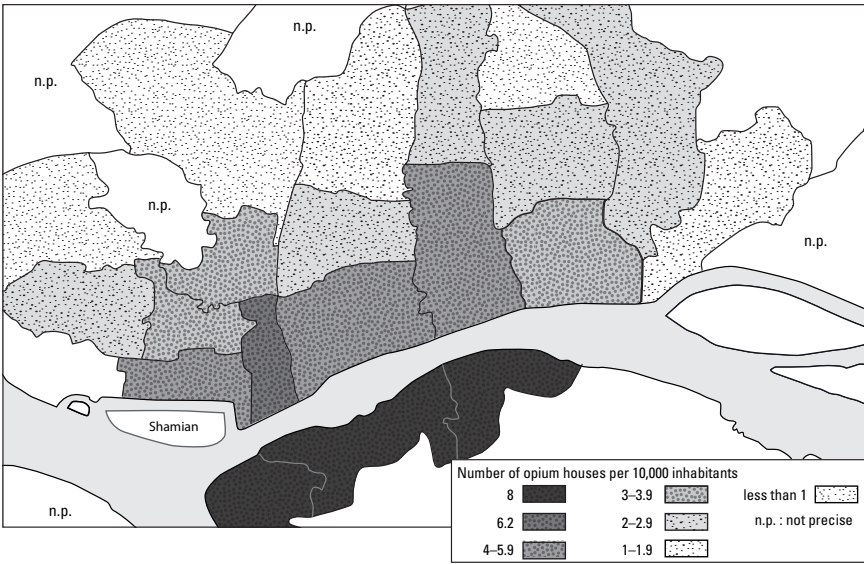


Map 7. The distribution of opium-related offenses by district (1921–1923). *Sources: Guangzhoushi jingchaju gong'an shixiang baogao, and Guangzhoushi shizhengting zongwu ke bianjigu, Guangzhoushi shizheng gaiyao.*





Map 8. Places with opium houses in Canton's periphery (1915 and 1936–1937). Sources: *Huaguobao*, *Yuehuabao*, and *Xunhuan ribao*.



Map 9. Number of opium houses per 10,000 inhabitants in 1933 (district-wise). Sources: *Yuehuabao*, 18 April 1933 (data on opium houses), and *Guangzhoushi diaocha renkou weiyuanhui*, *Guangzhishi ershiyi renkou diaocha baogao shu* (data on the distribution of the population).



Plate 1. Boiling opium.

Source: *Tuhua ribao* 344 (ca. 1910): 7.

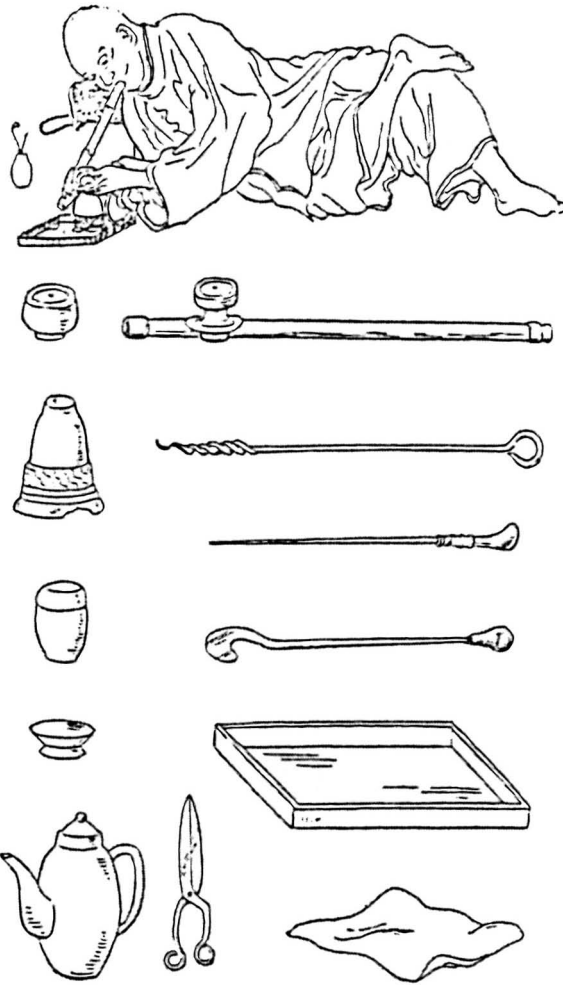


Plate 2. The smoker's paraphernalia. From left to right and top to bottom: a bowl, a complete pipe, an opium lamp, three types of scrapers, a jar for prepared opium, a saucer for recovering dross, a tray, a teapot, a pair of scissors (for the lamp wick), and a cloth.  
 Source: Taiwan zongdufu zhuanmai ju, *Taiwan apianzhi*, 1926, cited in Lin Manhong, *Qingmo shehui liuxing xishi yapian yanjiu*, 491.



Plate 3. A wealthy smoker at home. Note the ubiquitous spittoon and tea set.  
Source: *Tuhua ribao* 152 (ca. 1909): 10.





Plate 4. Preparing opium pellets. The central figure, reclining on the *luohanchuang*, heats an opium pellet over a lamp while holding a jar of prepared opium in the other hand. A spittoon stands on the floor. Source: *Dianshizhai huabao* 28, no. 12 (late 1880s): 89.



Plate 5. *Guangdong jinyanju* fiscal stamp used to certify consignments of raw opium (early 1930s). Source: Guangdong Provincial Archives, series 95/1, file no. 639 (Maritime Customs of Kowloon).



Plate 6. Smokers in a rich man's home. They have removed their shoes and are on a *luohanchuang*. Source: *Tuhua ribao* 341 (ca. 1910): 7.





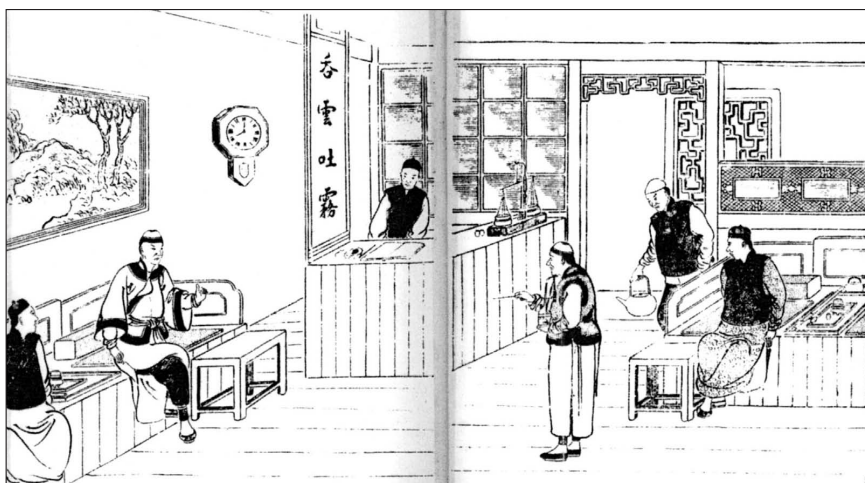


Plate 8. Two luxury opium houses (Shanghai) in the mid 1880s. Waiters serve tea in both illustrations. Source: *Dianshizhai huabao*, 6, no. 4 (mid-1880s): 32 (top); 28, no. 1 (late 1880s): 7 (bottom).



Plate 9 (left). A *yantiao* smoking den in Canton in 1907. The pipes have a distinctive shape. Source: *Shishi huabao*, July 1907, p. 12b.

Plate 10 (below). A neighborhood opium house (Shanghai) in the mid-1880s. The furnishings are simple. The pipes are kept on a rack behind the counter at the entrance, where customers receive their pipes and the opium is weighed out for them. The individual at the bottom right appears to be boiling opium (see fig. 1). Source: *Dianshizhai huabao* 1, no. 10 (early 1880s): 80.

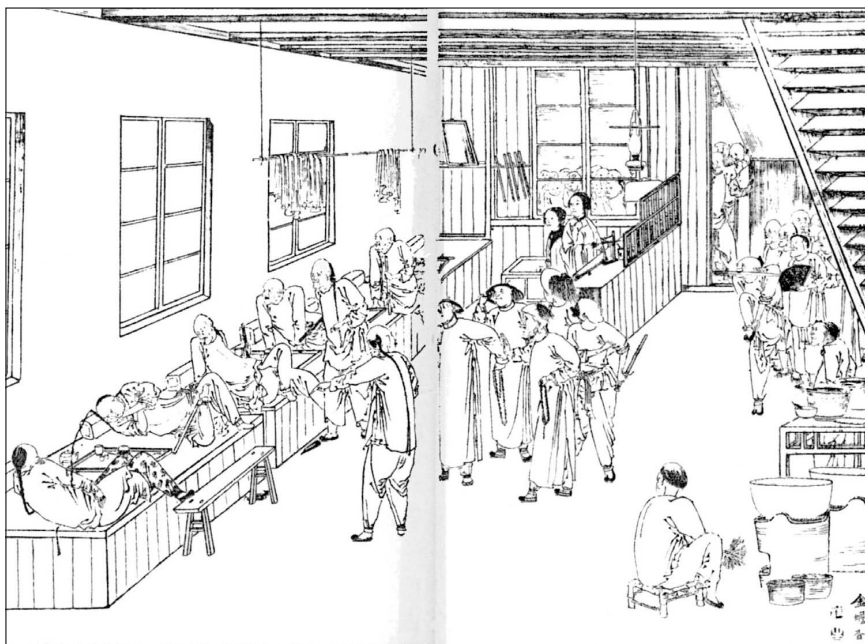




Plate 11. A brawl in a neighborhood opium house (Shanghai) at the end of the 1880s.  
Source: *Dianshizhai huabao* 28, no. 12 (late 1880s): 95.





Plate 12. Anti-opium propaganda, on the theme of the “rake’s progress” or “descent into hell.” Sources: *Opium, a World Problem*, March 1928, p. 34 (top), and *Jinyan banyuekan* 1 (June 1936): n.p. (bottom).

## 看看們胞同品毒片鴉食鴉請



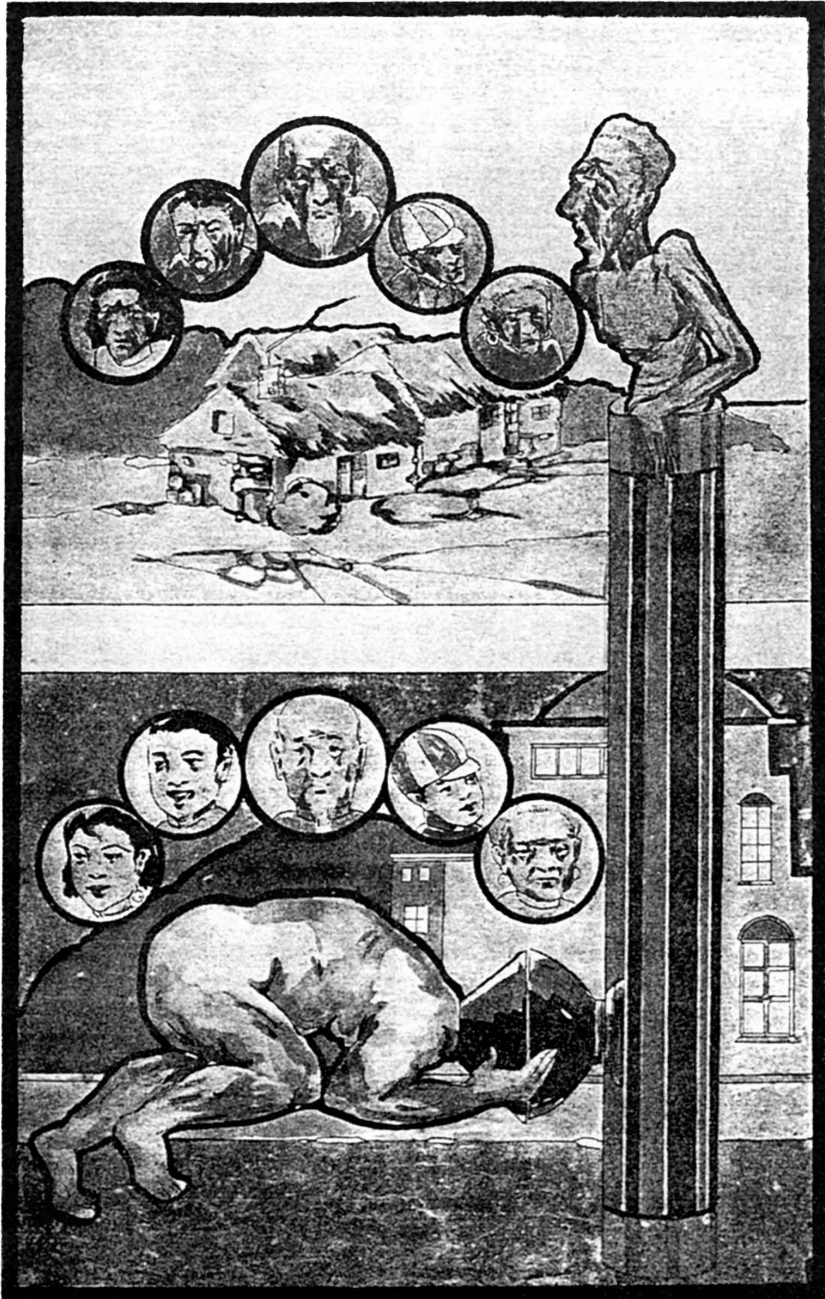


Plate 13. Anti-opium propaganda: “he smokes away his wealth through the stem of his pipe,” a variant of the “descent into hell” theme. Source: *Jinyan banyuekan* 1 (June 1936): n.p.



Plate 14. Anti-opium propaganda: “salvation or death.” Source: *Jinyan zhuankan* (June 1937): 85 and 86.



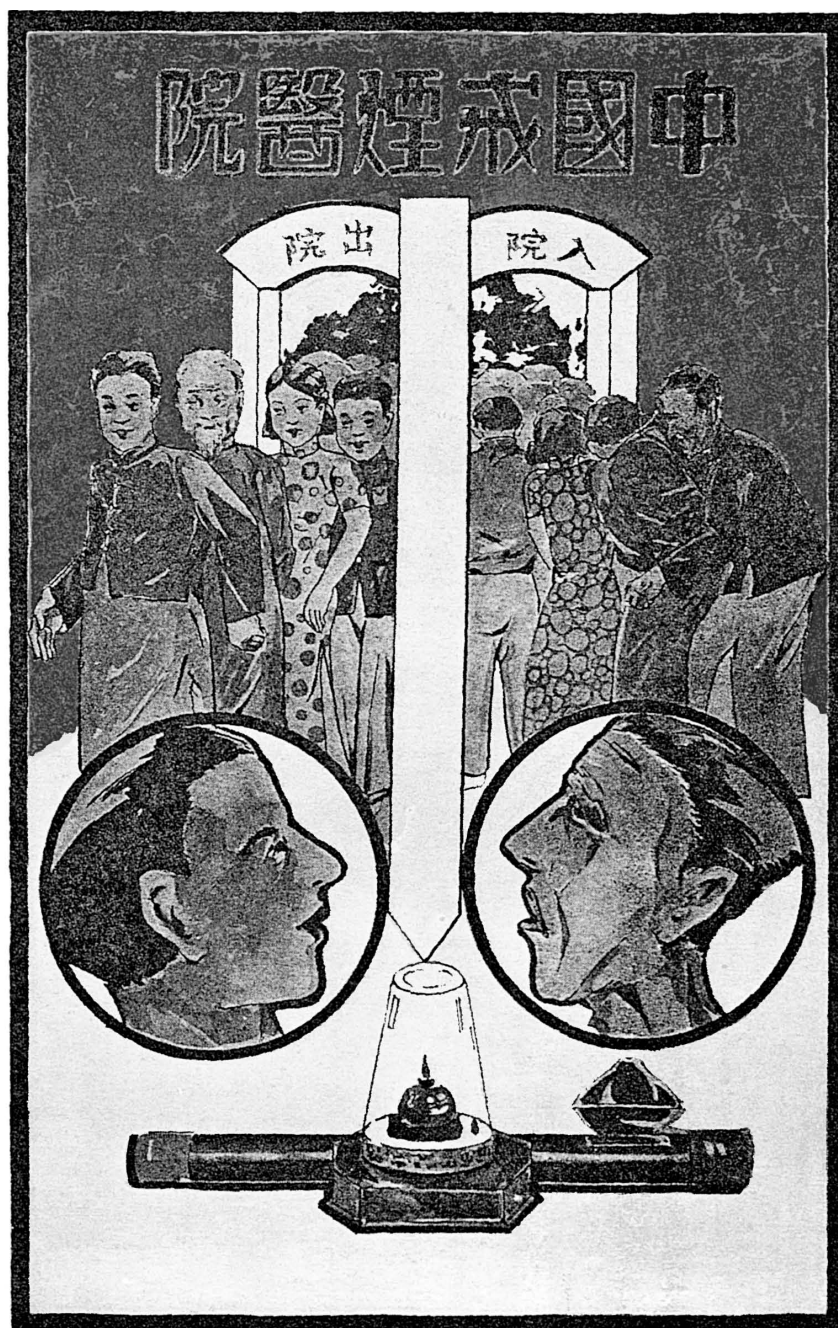


Plate 15. Anti-opium propaganda: "salvation or death." Source: *Jinyan banyuekan* 1 (June 1936): n.p.

# 鴉片與社會

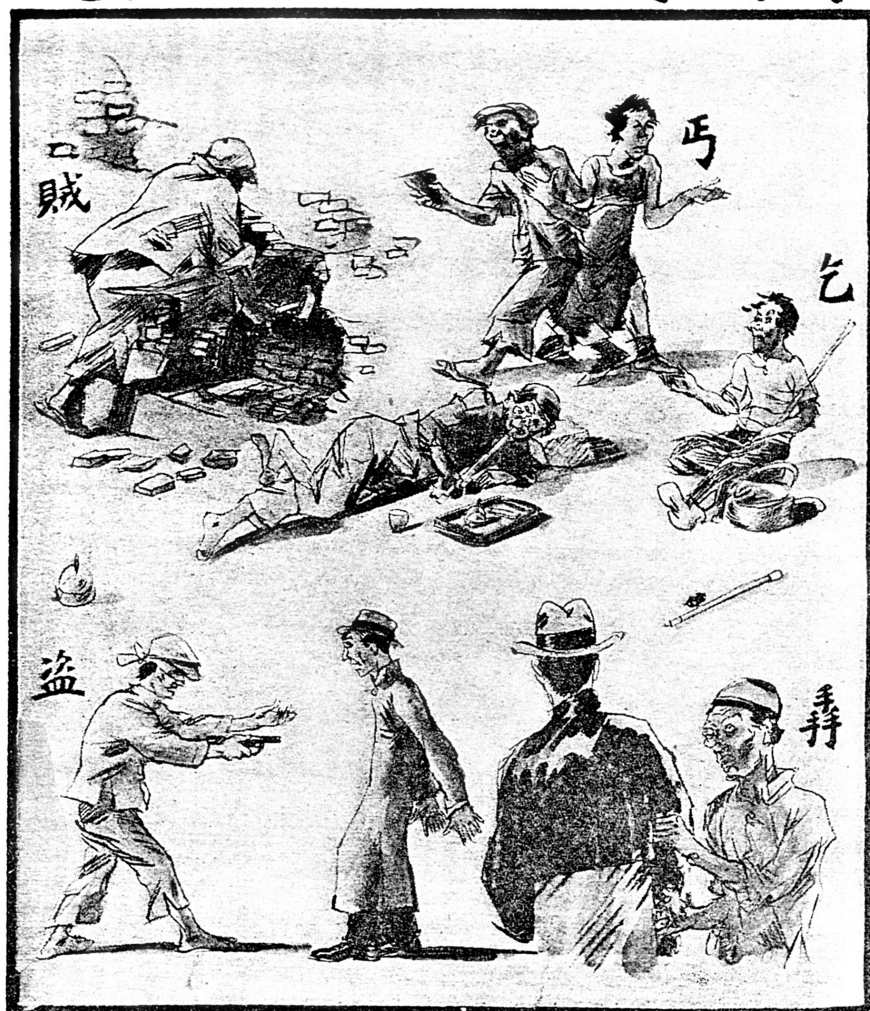


Plate 16. Anti-opium propaganda: "the scourge of society." Source: *Jinyan banyuekan* 1 (June 1936): n.p.



彈炸機飛於甚害之毒煙

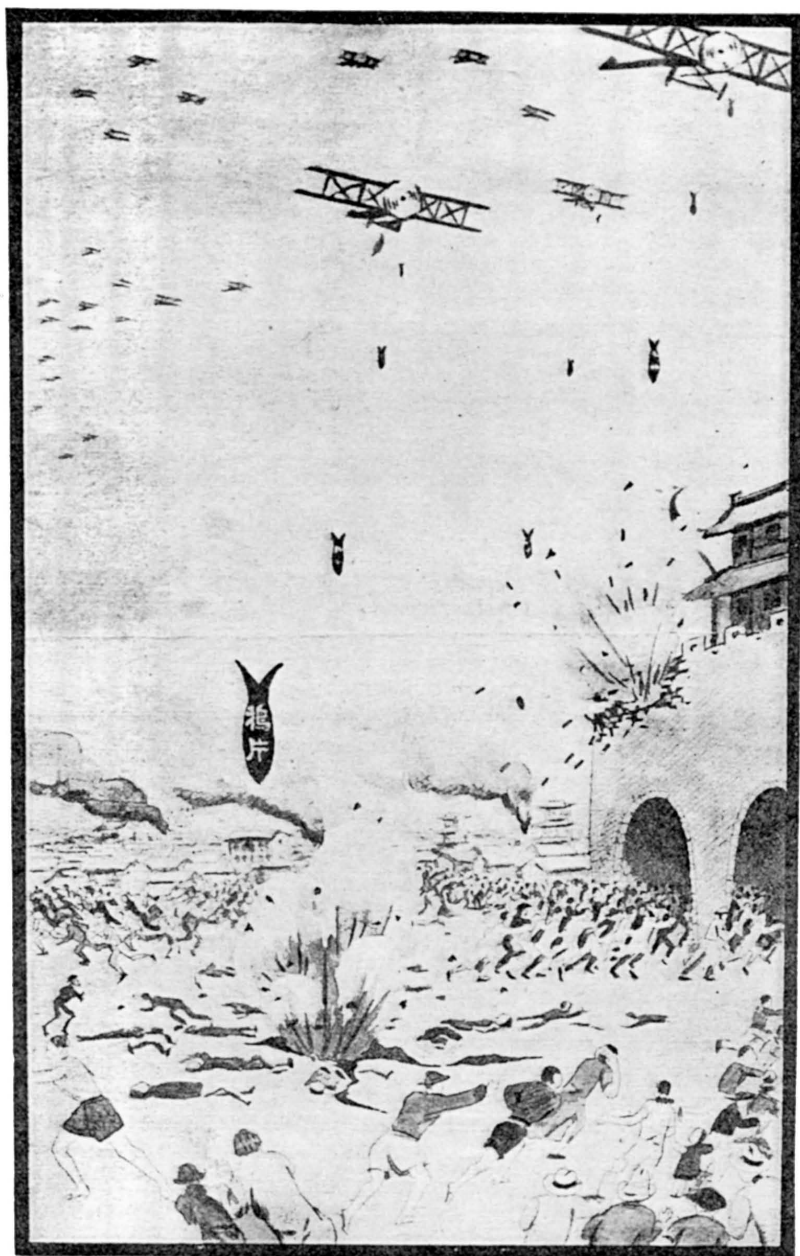


Plate 17. Anti-opium propaganda: "the scourge of society." Source: *Jinyan banyuekan* 1 (June 1936): n.p.



Plate 18. Anti-opium propaganda: “the scourge of society.” Source: *Judu yuekan* 26 (December 1928): cover page.



Plate 19. Anti-opium propaganda: “the scourge of society.” Source: NAOA posters printed in *Dang'an yu shixue* 3 (1996): n.p.



Plate 20. Anti-opium propaganda: "the scourge of society." Source: NAOA poster, Hoover Library.



# 刊月

# 毒拒

刊特週動運毒

拒國全屆六



## OPIUM

A NATIONAL ISSUE AUGUST 1929

XXXII

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Plate 21. Anti-opium propaganda: "glory to the combat against opium." Source: *Jindu yuekan* 32 (August 1929): cover page.





Plate 22 (left). Anti-opium propaganda: "Glory to the combat against opium!" Source: *Judu yuekan* 24 (August 1928): cover page.



Plate 23 (right). Advertisement for medicine against opium addiction. Source: *Yugong sanrikan* 85 (ca. 1930): 2.



Plate 24. Emaciated smokers in a late-Qing illustrated magazine of Canton. By this time, pawnshops were refusing to accept smoking paraphernalia. Here, smokers are being turned away with their pipes. *Source: Shishi huabao*, January 1907, p. 3b.

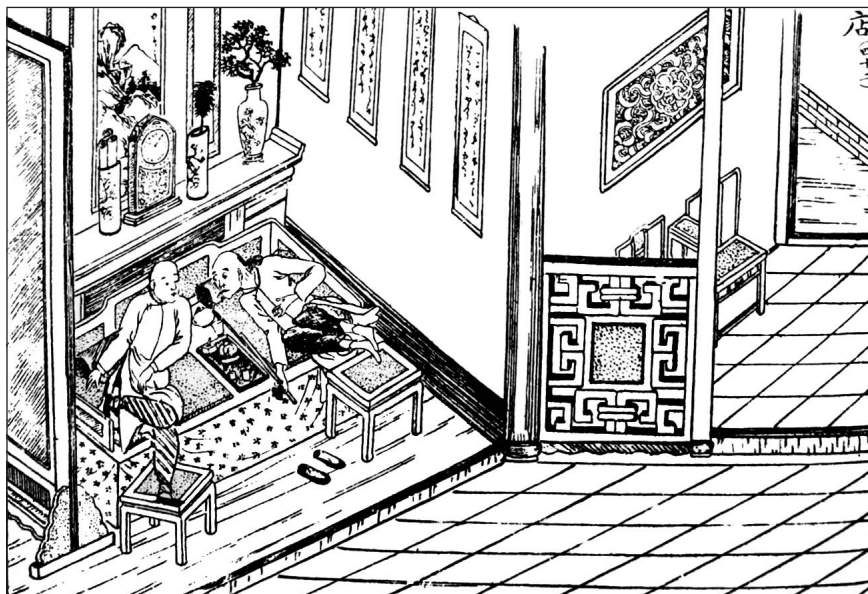


Plate 25 (above). Picture of an emaciated smoker in a late-Qing magazine. Source: *Tuhua ribao* 42 (ca. 1909): 5.

Plate 26 (right). Advertisement for medicine to fight opium addiction. Source: *Shenbao*, 6 March 1935.

馬代斷癮  
救苦金丹  
中央禁烟委員會主席題「除惡務盡」  
鴉片紅丸為摧殘生命之毒劑  
不早戒除：慘如上圖  
專戒鴉片紅丸輕癮一料戒絕  
照常吸烟見烟自厭十天斷癮  
風行六十餘年斷癮救百萬人  
戒烟促促任簡索 藥房均有售  
上海白克路天津峻之堂發行

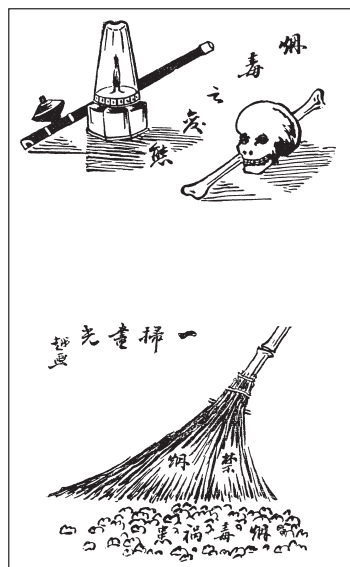


Plate 27. The skull as a reminder of death: anti-opium posters. Sources: *Opium: A World Problem*, November 1928, p. 22 (left); *Judu yuekan* 45 (November 1930): cover page (right); and *Jinyan zhuan*, June 1937, p. 90 (bottom).





Plate 28. The “skull-man” theme echoed in the popular Canton press. Sources: *Zhujiang xingqi huabao* 17 (1928): 19 (top), and *Guangzhou zazhi* 29 (15 June 1934): 2 (bottom)





Plate 29. Allegories of gambling and opium. Source: *Guangzhou minguo ribao*, 31 June 1925.

## Opium in the Collective Mind during the Republican Period: The Imperfect Victory of Propaganda

Reconstructing the ways in which opium was represented among the population is an illusory goal. The best that the historian can hope for is to observe the divergent perceptions and beliefs attached to these social phenomena at different levels of society. Virgil Ho, studying attitudes under the Republic, has highlighted the huge difference in the judgments on prostitutes made by reformist circles including officials on the one hand and the general population on the other.<sup>1</sup> The approach is highly relevant and can help us make similar distinctions between the attitudes toward opium among the elite and in the general population. However, an approach based on social groups, which are difficult to define in any case, obscures a major difficulty, to wit, that individuals are often capable of entertaining dissonant representations, ideas, and even value judgments on one and the same subject.

Rather than study the perceptions and attitudes of predefined social groups toward opium smokers in Canton under the Republic, it might be more useful to start from two “poles of opinion”: the pro-opium pole and the anti-opium pole. There did exist two relatively coherent and opposed systems that must be characterized before any attempt is made to measure their respective influence on the population.

The notion of two opposite poles is obviously no more than a convenient working hypothesis. It should especially not encourage the idea that there existed any sort of balanced debate on the subject: the adversaries of opium formed an organized camp. They occupied the high ground and even had specialized journals that disseminated an aggressive variety of propaganda. They account for the lion's share of the extant sources. The pro-opium camp poses greater problems because the sources that have come down to us are far from prolific.

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<sup>1</sup> Virgil Ho, “To Laugh at a Penniless Man Rather than a Prostitute,” *European Journal of East Asian studies* 1, no. 1 (2001): 103–112.

### The Value Systems of the Opium Smokers

Keith McMahon has broken ground on the history of the mentalities of smokers by studying a corpus of literary texts on opium dating from the late-Qing period,<sup>2</sup> chief of which is an essay from 1878 called “Yanhua” (Opium talk). Its author, Zhang Changjia, writes about his own experience of the pleasures and dangers of opium. There are also poems on this theme from the same period.<sup>3</sup>

Much as one might like to follow in McMahon’s steps and study pro-opium literature from Republican times, works describing a smoker’s intimate experiences and even celebrating the act of smoking are not available from this later period.<sup>4</sup> Faced with the incessant barrage of anti-opium propaganda, the frontline of the opium smokers was henceforth very much in retreat. In the sources, they now became a silent class: they no longer ventured to make any public eulogy of opium, nor did they attempt to convert others to their ranks. Thus, even the irreverent and deliberately iconoclastic and satirical magazine *Lunyu*, which often published articles in defense of drunkenness, tobacco, or even gambling, never ceased to display a severely hostile tone toward opium when it did mention the subject. Not one contributor to the *Lunyu* ever presented himself as an opium smoker.<sup>5</sup>

This lack of sources from the smokers’ side obliges the historian to patiently piece together many diverse fragments in order to re-create the smokers’ point of view. These fragments include collections of absurd beliefs by opium smokers compiled by anti-opium writers and the occasional inquiry that briefly gives voice to a small group of opium smokers.<sup>6</sup> Another type of source is the narratives ascribed to smokers by persons hostile to the practice who had been taken to opium houses by friends.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup> McMahon, “Opium and Sexuality,” 129–179.

<sup>3</sup> For a few of these poems translated into English, see Zheng, *The Social Life of Opium in China*, 132–133; McMahon, *The Fall of the God of Money*, 194–196.

<sup>4</sup> There is one source that could have greatly increased our knowledge of the mentalities of the smokers—the inscriptions engraved on the pipes themselves. However, the fact that these pipes are scattered among many different collections, the frequent absence of any clue to their origin (and especially their date), and the very concise and elusive nature of the inscriptions themselves make it very difficult to use them as sources.

<sup>5</sup> The magazine *Lunyu* [Analects] was published in Shanghai by the famous satirical writer Lin Yutang from 1932 to 1937. For articles on alcohol, gambling, and tobacco, see 38 (April 1934): 680–681, 63 (April 1935): 742, 81 (February 1936): 452–453, 83 (March 1936): 527–528. For examples of articles on opium, see 30 (December 1933): 277, 80 (January 1936): 406–409.

<sup>6</sup> For example: YHB, 17 January 1932; XGR, 20 June 1935.

<sup>7</sup> *Judu yuekan* 79 (ca. 1934): 30–32.



One might begin by asking whether the smokers even possessed that essential attribute of existence as a social group that would have made them more than a mere collection of individuals, namely, a shared value system, or, to paraphrase the sociologist Howard Becker, a deviant subculture defined as a set of ideas and viewpoints on the social world and on the ways of adapting to it as well as a set of routine activities based on these viewpoints.<sup>8</sup> For Canton's smokers, it would be preferable to think in terms of a value system rather than a deviant subculture, since opium consumption was legal under the Republic and it would be overly hasty to describe smokers as deviants in the eyes of the population as a whole.

For the late-Qing period, McMahon concludes, albeit with some reservations, that there truly was such a system of values: "The male community of smokers was an inside group with a common understanding expressed in language (the use of special terms), experience (e.g., craving, the varying qualities and types of opium), interests (as seen in the deals made in opium dens), and their general separateness from nonsmokers, especially those who considered opium smokers to be wasted people."<sup>9</sup>

This passage has the merit of also pointing out a number of factors that underpinned the smokers' value system: their specific language, the material and psychological experience, the "technical expertise," and the relationship with nonsmokers. In addition, there was the phenomenon of sociability, to which McMahon later makes extensive reference. However, the community that he describes through the prism of literary works alone corresponded above all to that of smokers of a certain social rank. Its value system did not necessarily coincide with that of all smokers. Still, we can consider it an ideal type, characteristic of a pre-1906 era marked by the importance of consumption among the elites, even if the practice had spread into every social class during the second half of the nineteenth century.

That the value system of the smokers was a mental territory greatly fashioned by the elite is confirmed by Alexander Des Forges's examination of another corpus (newspapers, short stories, travel guides, and novels centered on Shanghai) dating from the end of the imperial period and reflecting a somewhat more "mass-based" perspective than McMahon's, to which we must add the information collected by the Royal Commission on Opium in 1894. We can see now that smokers under the Republic created a system of values, one that was appreciably different from that of the pre-1906 period, however.

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<sup>8</sup> Howard Becker, *Outsiders* (Paris: Métailié, 1985), 61.

<sup>9</sup> McMahon, "Opium and Sexuality," 133.

*A Refined Practice Based on an Essential Material Culture*

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the prohibitive cost of opium consumption meant that it had penetrated and was practiced only among the more privileged classes.<sup>10</sup> Opium met no physiological need and was related in two ways to the material fortunes of its adepts: it was both permitted by wealth and served to express it. Thus, opium consumption became established as what Pierre Bourdieu calls a “taste of luxury.” According to Bourdieu, tastes of luxury come characteristically from societal sections for whom the “material conditions of existence are defined by *distance from necessity*, by liberties or, as is sometimes said, the *facilities* offered by the possession of some capital.”<sup>11</sup>

However, the practice of smoking opium spread throughout society by imitation, and opium consumption soon stopped being a luxury.<sup>12</sup> Once opium consumption (even occasional) came within range of all, the only way it could continue to be a practice of distinction for the elite was for it to be based on the variety of opium smoked, the apparatus used, or the very act of smoking in itself (for example, when a third party, often a servant, prepared the opium pellets and presented the pipes). This factor especially explains why Indian opium ultimately resisted competition from local, far cheaper varieties. A missionary observed in the mid-nineteenth century: “[British opium,] despite adulteration, is very costly and reserved for smokers of distinction. This odd situation stems from the vanity of the wealthy Chinese who despise the idea of smoking opium prepared in their own country and therefore unfit to ruin them.”<sup>13</sup> Canton smokers in the 1890s confirmed that the wealthiest smokers were infatuated with the Indian varieties to the exclusion of all others.<sup>14</sup>

Under the Republic, there were still smokers who laid claim to an elitist conception of smoking based on a celebration of quality and refinement even though, as we shall see, such smokers were becoming the exception.

<sup>10</sup> Butel, *L'opium, histoire d'une fascination*, 50; *Chinese Repository* (May 1839): 3. As a rule, in the history of human societies, novel practices of consumption tend to spread (from the top), as was the case in modern Europe for coffee and tobacco: Frédéric Mauro, *Histoire du café* (Paris: Desjonquières, 1991), 40–41, 75; Didier Nourrisson, *Histoire sociale du tabac* (Paris: Christian, 1999), 31–39.

<sup>11</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *La distinction, critique sociale du jugement* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1979), 198. The italics are Bourdieu's.

<sup>12</sup> Speech by Hu Hanmin before the national conference on opium in Nanjing in November 1928: Zhongguo Guomindang zhongyan zhixing weiyuanhui xuanchuan buyin, *Jinyan xuanchuan huikan*, 24.

<sup>13</sup> Huc Evariste-Régis, *L'Empire chinois faisant suite à l'ouvrage intitulé, Souvenirs d'un voyage dans la Tartarie et le Tibet* (Paris: De Gaume, 1857), 32.

<sup>14</sup> Royal Commission on Opium, *Report*, 216, 221.

First, the practice of delegating the tedious task of preparing pipes remained in vogue. It was the very *raison d'être* of the *yanhua*.

Canton under the Republic also had its aficionados of what might be called the great "vintages" of opium. An article in the *Yuehuabao* mentions a retired Cantonese opera actor's passion for opium. After coming into a life of comfort and material ease, this person would visit an opium house every day, posing as a connoisseur, waxing forth on the different varieties of opium, and their degrees of aging, and boasting about the exceptional quality of his own stock at home, thus attracting the attention of malicious individuals who soon proceeded to break into his home and steal his opium.<sup>15</sup> However, the most convincing proof of the continuing appeal of rare opium among the elite is the fact that the demand for luxury opium from Macao or Hong Kong persisted throughout the Republican period despite its very high price.<sup>16</sup>

Smokers among the elite are also noted to have paid extreme attention to their smoking paraphernalia. Luo Liming mentions wealthy smokers who sought refinement in the choice of their equipment. One Laosi used opulent pipes made out of rhinoceros horn, the rarest bamboo, or other precious materials. He was equally demanding with the pipe bowls, using only the best brands, and he would even pay attention to the sounds they emitted when sucking in the smoke. His collection included bowls delicately shaped like animals that were meant only for decoration and had no pipe hole.<sup>17</sup> Laosi displayed the same concern for luxury with the other objects of the smoker's panoply, such as the tray, the needle, and the furniture. This tendency could lead to what can only be called a form of fetishism invested in costly objects used in opium consumption. Luo Liming refers to the extreme case of a very wealthy young man who ruined himself by buying the most precious rare objects. These included even the opium scraper and the needle, basic items whose quality had absolutely no effect on the pleasure of smoking. These objects he kept in very delicately ornamented boxes.<sup>18</sup>

Such fetishistic behavior was obviously limited to extremely wealthy opium lovers. Still, on a broader scale and more significantly, certain Canton opium houses in the 1930s kept very old and famous pipes known to draw customers.<sup>19</sup> News reports mention opium bowls made in ear-

<sup>15</sup> YHB, 17 January 1932.

<sup>16</sup> XGR, 14 June 1935.

<sup>17</sup> Luo Liming, *Tangxi huayue hen*, 253–254.

<sup>18</sup> Luo Liming, *Tangxi huayue hen*, 84–85.

<sup>19</sup> XGR, 18 June 1935; YHB, 9 July 1931, 5 August 1931, 9 February 1936; *Zhujiang xingqi huabao* 4 (ca. 1927): 18. In the latter case, an opium-house owner's business relied so much on a famous pipe that when it was stolen, he sought the help of a fortune-teller to try to find it.

lier times by renowned craftsmen: these continued to be much prized.<sup>20</sup> Certain smokers were proud to own and preserve pipes that were family heirlooms handed down over many generations.<sup>21</sup>

This type of specialized knowledge about fine equipment was widespread, reaching well beyond elite smokers. The way in which the Canton newspapers mentioned famous brands leaves no doubt as to their renown, which stretched even beyond the community of opium smokers.<sup>22</sup> Expertise on the quality of equipment and opium was apparently not limited to those who could afford to consume expensive opium with matching paraphernalia. We can suppose that there was some widespread aspiration to quality and that many smokers participated in it according to their means. Thus, one Hong Kong coolie told the League of Nations Enquiry Commission on Opium in the Far East that he used smuggled opium for his daily needs but that, from time to time, when he had enough money, he would go in for stronger and better-flavored opium from the government monopoly.<sup>23</sup>

Smoking *yantiao* with makeshift pipes was also important in the definition of smokers' material culture. It completed the range of practices of consumption and their hierarchical organization: opposite imported luxury opium smoked with highly precious pipes, it was situated at the lowest level on the scale of refinement and was therefore a true counterpoint. *Yantiao* was indeed deemed to be especially unworthy of upper-class smokers.<sup>24</sup> The description in a *Yuehuabao* article of a young and wealthy smoker's ruin illustrates this phenomenon: as a promising student and then as a happy father, he starts out with high-quality opium using very good equipment (a pipe made of precious bamboo, a bowl of the Xiangniang brand). However, after selling his property and then his son, and finally driving his wife to suicide, he reaches the bottom rung and becomes a rickshaw puller reduced to smoking vile *yantiao*.<sup>25</sup> Certain extant descriptions culminate in a reference to *yantiao* as an expression of the smoker's ultimate decline, the fact that he had fallen into addiction, a

<sup>20</sup> GZMGRB, 22 April 1924; YHB, 27 December 1931, 1 June 1935.

<sup>21</sup> *Yugong sanrikan* 75 (ca. 1930).

<sup>22</sup> For example, the title of the article dated 27 December 1931 in the YHB is "Qingcao yandou niangcheng yi chang wuju" [A *qingcao* opium pipe bowl causes fisticuffs], which clearly suggests that the average reader knew about *qingcao* opium pipe bowls.

<sup>23</sup> SDN/LON, file S196, interview dated 20 January 1930.

<sup>24</sup> YHB, 25 June 1933: In this article, the narrator clearly presented the consumption of *yantiao* as being unworthy when compared with the consumption of normal opium and was surprised to learn that wealthy individuals would sometimes visit establishments selling *yantiao*.

<sup>25</sup> YHB, 10 and 11 June 1935.

condition much disapproved of by smokers themselves.<sup>26</sup> The reason that *yantiao* was rejected could lie both in its admittedly poor flavor and its low price. But, above all, compared with smoking classic opium, smoking *yantiao* entailed a certain *simplification of smoking rituals* in which the smoker sought only the effects of the drug without paying any attention to the act of consumption itself. In this respect, the real advantages of *yantiao* (the speed with which it was consumed, the simplicity of the associated equipment, its low price, and its powerful effects that made it resemble modern-day drugs such as LSD and crack) put it at the opposite end of the vaunted scale of refinement for opium consumption.<sup>27</sup>

The value that smokers attached to the ritual of consumption was amplified by another widely held view mentioned twice in the sources: the act of smoking was imbued with remarkable plenitude because of the five elements ever present in the smokers' panoply: the metal that composed the scraper, needle, and lamp base, the wood of the pipe stem, the fire used to boil the opium and shape and burn the pellets, and the liquid constituted by *yangao*. Earth was the substance of the pipe bowl. And, *yantu* (raw opium) contains the character *tu*, meaning "earth."<sup>28</sup>

The construction of such pleasant theories is yet another example of the attention and attachment given to sophistication in opium consumption. The elaborate process of opium smoking was not seen as a set of constraints, even if it entailed real constraints when compared with the modes of consumption of other easier-to-use substances such as morphine or *yantiao*. Rather, it was claimed as a mark of superiority.

### *Moral Code and Sociability*

Consuming opium was also celebrated by its adepts as an eminently socializing practice. Gatherings of smokers sharing a pastime were part of a very ancient tradition where people of high station would come together around a common passion and share the "perfume of orchids." That they would on occasion compose poetry to celebrate their joy stemmed from the same tradition.<sup>29</sup>

These groups of smokers followed a number of precepts of refined politeness that were adapted to the specific nature of the practice. Kind

<sup>26</sup> *Zhujiang xingqi huabao* 20 (ca. 1928): 19.

<sup>27</sup> This attitude was echoed at the beginning of the twentieth century in France in the revulsion displayed by opium smokers toward drugs such as morphine. They denounced the vulgarity of morphine and the triviality of its mode of consumption as opposed to the sophisticated rite of preparing an opium pipe: Jean Jacques Yvoret, *Les poisons de l'esprit* [The poisons of the mind] (Paris: Quai Voltaire, 1992), 182–192.

<sup>28</sup> Luo Liming, *Tangxi huayue hen*, 84, 252; XGR, 20 June 1935.

<sup>29</sup> McMahon, *The Fall of the God of Money*, 18, 106.

attention was paid to beginners and to their initiation into the skills needed to prepare an opium pipe. Beyond these more-or-less elitist circles too, opium consumption at the end of the nineteenth century became a special moment in social life, appreciated as such among Canton's merchants and office workers.<sup>30</sup>

There are many examples to show that the link between opium consumption and the celebration of sociability continued into the 1930s. In June 1935, a number of opium consumers told a *Xianggang gongshang ribao* journalist that one reason for their habit was the exceptional quality of the relationship among smokers.<sup>31</sup> In the 1934 sociological study cited in chapter 1, we have seen how Tanka smokers asserted that taking opium was the most pleasant of pastimes: "two pillows to chat about current matters and an opium lamp suffice to banish all cares."<sup>32</sup> A similar phrase posted in an opium house in Honam and recorded by a witness at the beginning of the 1930s said "through the perfume [of opium], good friends are kept" (*quan ping qi wei liu zhi ji*).<sup>33</sup>

We have seen that even home consumption was often a group activity. And there is one fact so obvious that observers can easily miss its implications: clandestine opium houses were a constant presence in Canton. Clearly, it was far riskier to smoke in a clandestine house than at home without a permit. The coming and going of customers, the noise, and the smoke all made it easy to spot a clandestine opium house. Hence, the only possible explanation why clandestine smoking was done by preference in the (generally Spartan) clandestine establishments was that, despite the extra risks involved, smokers were greatly attached to group consumption.

Twice the sources mention a moral code expressing the idea, albeit in bantering fashion, that smoking opium in a group made for a special moment in human relationships. The code drew a parallel between the five cardinal virtues and their application to opium consumption in a group.<sup>34</sup> *Ren*, the virtue of benevolence and humanity, corresponded to the duty of seasoned smokers to constantly warn youth about the pitfall of addictions so that opium was never taken to anything more than a simple amusement. *Yi* (uprightness and justice) corresponded to the duty to satisfy the

<sup>30</sup> Royal Commission on Opium, *Report*, 222–225, 227.

<sup>31</sup> XGR, 20 June 1935. This same idea can be found in Zhi Yun, "Fengyu dan, shi: Dan yapian" [On rainy weather and good weather, no. 10: On opium], *Yuzhoufeng* 17 (16 May 1936): 229, and in A Mu, "Jinyan yaogao zai Chaomei" [Remedies for opium in the Chaomei region], in Tao Kangde, *Yapian zhi jinxi*, 69.

<sup>32</sup> Lingnan shehui yanjiusuo, *Shanan danmin*, 103.

<sup>33</sup> *Lunyu* 30 (December 1933): 277.

<sup>34</sup> Luo Liming, *Tangxi huayue hen*, 252–253; XGR, 20 June 1935.

craving of the impecunious smoker.<sup>35</sup> *Li* (courtesy) found expression in the politeness with which smokers would allow each other first turn at the pipe. *Zhi* (wisdom) implied mastery of techniques and knowledge indissociable from the art of smoking. Finally, smokers had to unfailingly follow the path of *xin* (trust) and never miss the appointed time for smoking. Thus, the group consumption of opium was presented as being governed by the same principles, derived from the concepts of an ideal Confucian social order, as those that generally governed relationships among gentlemen.

The special human relationships thus described also stemmed in part from shared experience and knowledge of craving and dependency as well as the relative technical difficulty involved in consuming opium. Experience of craving justified the virtues *ren*, *yi*, and *li*: smokers needed to be warned against the trap of addiction, the first member of the group who might feel a craving was allowed the first turn at the pipe, and opium had to be shared with anyone in the throes of a craving. The virtue *zhi* illustrated the difficulty of preparing opium pellets and consuming them.

*The Smoker's Categorical Imperative: Avoid Excess*

Alexander Des Forges observes that the corpus of late-Qing writings he assembled conveys a twofold image: opium was seen as a poison but, at the same time, as one of the wonders of existence that would be a pity to discard. This apparent contradiction was explained by the notion that there were good smokers and bad smokers. The former, who were wealthy, had the time and money to spend. They knew moderation.<sup>36</sup> Opium consumption by this category of smokers was presented as the recreational counterpart of productive activity: the smoker devoted time and expended energy in earning money, and it was therefore legitimate and socially profitable for him to relax by smoking in a reasonable way and so redistribute a part of what he had earned. The consumption of opium thus became a pleasant pastime that remained harmless for an intelligent individual so long as he did not use it to excess. On the contrary, those bad smokers who were impoverished were incapable of self-control, unlike people of a higher class, and would inevitably come to ruin.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> In the case of these first two virtues alone, the XGR version differs from Luo Liming's. This can be explained by the fact there were variants, but also by the fact that the reporter who recorded the smokers' words did not quite understand them. This is a good reason to follow Luo's version, as Luo was familiar with opium-related matters. As the newspaper put it, *ren* corresponded to the importance that had to be given to smoking apparatus and *yi* to the duty of the smoker not to seek opium lightly.

<sup>36</sup> See also Royal Commission on Opium, *Report*, 225–226.

<sup>37</sup> Des Forges, "Opium/Leisure/Shanghai," 171–179.



The boundary between appropriate use and excessive consumption was more generally defined by the relationship to addiction. Under the Qing, Zhang Changjia, the author of *Yanhua*, had already made a distinction between addicts and nonaddicts. His book, which, as it happened, also celebrated the pleasures of opium, explicitly condemned excessive dependence on the drug. He claimed thus to be offering a kind of guide that, by furnishing, for instance, detailed examples of a subtle typology of dependency, would help readers to avoid pitfalls that could only lead to self-destruction.<sup>38</sup> Firsthand reports by several Cantonese smokers from the 1890s point to an acute awareness of the difference between moderate consumption, which was even presented as being beneficial to health, and over consumption which, through increasingly heavy doses, led to dependency and thence to the worst kinds of physical and moral disorder.<sup>39</sup>

Under the Republic, the definition of appropriate consumption was never related to the consumer's economic circumstances but was based solely on the relationship with dependency. Smokers acknowledged that while smoking opium brought them much pleasure, they had to avoid dependency. Luo Liming went so far as to cite a proverb: the sweetest revenge against an enemy was not to kill him but make his son an opium addict.<sup>40</sup>

It was accepted, however, that dependency could be avoided if the right precepts were followed. Smokers interviewed on the subject unhesitatingly admitted that smoking opium could lead to dependency (*cheng yin*) —a condition that was not at all desirable. They believed at the same time that they could easily avoid this result by smoking exactly the same quantities of opium each day.<sup>41</sup> In the same vein, a provocative article in the journal *Renjianshi*, purporting to be a celebration of smoking and containing a few brief references to opium, concluded with the suggestion that the best way to fully enjoy the pleasures of smoking in all its forms (cigars, cigarettes, water pipes, and opium) was to consume these pleasures at the right times so as not to succumb to dependency. As for opium, the author of the article recommended that it be consumed only on Sundays: "I would venture to say that it would be impossible for anyone consuming opium only once a week to become dependent."<sup>42</sup> The sociological study on the Tankas of Shanan reveals that this community was well aware of

<sup>38</sup> McMahon, *The Fall of the God of Money*, 114–115, 118–119.

<sup>39</sup> Royal Commission on Opium, *Report*, 223–225.

<sup>40</sup> Luo Liming, *Tangxi huayue hen*, 252.

<sup>41</sup> XGR, 20 June 1935. A smoker in 1924 told the author of an article on opium that the right way to consume opium was to smoke it only after meals and to smoke always the same quantities: *Guangzhou zazhi* 1, no. 1 (1924): 6–9.

<sup>42</sup> Xu Xu, "Lun yan" [On smoking], *Renjianshi* 1 (5 August 1934): 41.

a distinction between dependent and nondependent smokers.<sup>43</sup> A magazine article describing the mores and practices of Cantonese smokers is particularly significant: it strives to explain how and why smokers could become dependent even though they knew what it meant to become dependent. The article mentions a very interesting fact: novices, through bravado, would exaggerate the quantities that they smoked every day, claiming to be addicts even when they were not. On the contrary, once they became truly dependent, they would conceal it out of shame. This they did, for example, by going to different smoking places. These dependent smokers became stingy and would always wheedle invitations to smoking parties. When their addiction reached an advanced stage and if they were not wealthy, they would start smoking *yantiao*.<sup>44</sup>

Dependency would thus put a smoker at odds with the value system of his group: having become enslaved to the physiological effects of the drug (and being ashamed of his condition), he would start flouting the principles of sociability among smokers. Turning away from notions of refined consumption, he would go in for the *yantiao* quick fix. The smokers' value system had a certain consistency. Its various components were organized around what proved to be its true keystone: the condemnation of dependency.

*The Beginning of Doubt: The Development of Guilt Feelings*

The value system of the smokers under the Republic cannot be sketched without a reference to the penetration into this group of a sense of guilt that was clearly inspired by the overabundance of anti-opium propaganda. Nothing can better illustrate this point than a minor but very significant news item: on 25 January 1936, two Westerners entered an opium house in Huadi District in an attempt to photograph the smokers—without their knowledge. They were spotted, however, and the smokers became patriotically infuriated (according to the article) at what they saw to be an insult to the Chinese people. Not content with expelling the pair, they confiscated the offending roll of film.<sup>45</sup> Gathered together in a place devoted to their drug, these smokers either believed that their habit harmed the country's prestige (this was the explanation given by the newspaper) or felt it undesirable, as individuals, to be photographed while indulging in their habit. Whatever the reason, this episode is an excellent example of the way in which the opium smokers themselves could have internalized

<sup>43</sup> Lingnan shehui yanjiusuo, *Shanan danmin*, 103.

<sup>44</sup> *Zhujiang xingqi huabao* 20 (ca. 1928): 19. We must note that the presence of *yantiao* was seen as the ultimate stage in the process of a smoker's decline.

<sup>45</sup> *YHB*, 28 January 1936.

a key aspect of the belief system repeated in the anti-opium propaganda of the period, that is, that opium consumption was not only harmful but also shameful and that it was not right to reveal this practice to foreigners. This anecdote is an indication that a certain sense of guilt had penetrated into the smokers' ranks. It must also be set against the fact that the overwhelming majority of photographs of opium smokers dates from the imperial period—not so much because of any lack of interest on the part of Western and Japanese travelers under the Republic who, by their own accounts, continued to be curious about opium consumption and opium houses,<sup>46</sup> as because Chinese smokers now put up resistance to being photographed while indulging in their habit.

Smokers therefore often had a sense of behaving wrongly. Thus, a Hong Kong merchant told the Enquiry Commission on Opium in the Far East that he totally agreed with the view that smoking opium was a bad habit and believed all Chinese thought the same way.<sup>47</sup> That not a single individual under the Republic was prepared to sing the praises of opium in public was significant. We shall see that this silence stemmed from two facts: first, that a good proportion of smokers from the wealthy and cultivated sections (capable of literary self-expression) had given up smoking opium and, second, that those privileged individuals who did remain faithful to opium were not proud of it. They dared not speak of themselves as smokers or even less dwell on the pleasures of opium.

It is here that the idea put forward earlier of a distinction between good (nondependent) smokers and those who fell into the trap of dependency reaches its limits. The new attitudes toward opium appear to totally contradict the distinction between dependent smokers and nondependent smokers and the attribution of value-enhancing qualities such as sophistication and sociability to opium consumption; we can assume that, hereafter, many smokers preferred to remain hidden from the public eye. One could no longer be proud of being a smoker. Here indeed was the main difference with the pre-1906 period.

### **The Smokers in the Anti-Opium Propaganda: A Badge of Shame that Worked**

The 1930s saw the construction of a set of consistent arguments against opium. The primary target of their denunciation was opium imports,

<sup>46</sup> For example, Abel Bonnard, *En Chine* [In China] (Paris: Fayard, 1924), 310; Victor Segalen, *Lettres de Chine* [Letters from China] (Paris: Plon, 1967), 138, 144, 167–169, 226; Muramatsu Shōfū, *Nankani asobite*, 285–290; Nishi Seiun, *Kanton hyakudai*, 56.

<sup>47</sup> SDN/LON, file S196, interview with Fung Wai Shing, managing director of the Kwong Sang Hong, dated 20 January 1931.

which were draining vast quantities of silver from the country, and poppy cultivation, which was unnecessarily taking over agricultural lands. The anti-opium discourse had undergone a major change at the end of the nineteenth century. Economic preoccupations gave way to the central idea that the ravages of opium in terms of health and morals were a very important factor in the decline of China. In the anti-opium rhetoric of the 1920s and 1930s, opium was always given as an explanation of China's critical situation. The attacks were now directed not primarily against opium in general but rather against the smoker, who was seen as a traitor.<sup>48</sup> This endeavor to cast a stigma on the smoker was undoubtedly one of the great successes of anti-opium propaganda.

The main thrust of the anti-opium propaganda documents in the Republican period was not so much to subject the opium smoker to critical analysis as to put him in the limelight and make his every flaw glaringly visible. In this project, it is the image that became the preferred weapon of anti-opium propaganda.

There are a variety of ways to characterize how the smoker was represented in the anti-opium propaganda: first, there are illustrations prepared by the NAOA and official anti-opium bodies that reveal the essential principles of this representation. However, anti-opium propaganda was also conveyed through other media, such as plays, and texts, such as articles and pamphlets. This propaganda was then echoed in other writings and illustrations in the press and in literature not specifically devoted to the fight against opium.

*The Illustrations of the Anti-Opium Propaganda: An Essay in Typology*<sup>49</sup>

The main themes of anti-opium propaganda can be seen most clearly in its illustrations, even if they also fed into other media. Posters from the *Judu yuekan* and *Opium, a World Problem* (two magazines of the National Anti-Opium Association) form a corpus of a dozen pieces created essentially by the artist Zhi Mo. They were widely disseminated.<sup>50</sup> The *Jinyan banyuekan*

<sup>48</sup> For a description of the development of the anti-opium discourse from the beginning of the nineteenth century and a detailed analysis of Guomindang propaganda on the question, see Paulès, "La lutte contre l'opium," 193–217.

<sup>49</sup> For a more detailed study of the illustrations of the propaganda, see Xavier Paulès, "Anti-Opium Visual Propaganda and the Deglamorisation of Opium, 1895–1937," *European Journal of East Asian Studies* 7, no. 2 (Autumn 2008): 229–262.

<sup>50</sup> An advertisement for a remedy against opium addiction in a Canton periodical refers to the wide distribution of these posters: *Yugong sanrikan* 85 and 86 (ca. 1930). This advertisement indeed repeated a part of a poster distributed by the NAOA: *Judu yuekan* 24 (August 1928): cover illustration (plate 22). In Shanxi Province, there was also a local anti-opium association that reproduced the drawing of a poster by the NAOA (plate 19): Henrietta Harrison, "Narcotics, Nationalism, and Class in China: The Transition from Opium to Morphine

and *Jinyan zhuankan* (official magazines published in 1936 and 1937) also published a significant set of twelve propaganda pictures. These two main sources of illustrations on the whole present the same themes using the same methods of exposure, which is sufficient reason to study them together without distinguishing between posters printed by the anti-opium association and those printed by the authorities.

This set of posters can be classified without difficulty into four categories:

#### The Descent into Hell (or Rake's Progress) Theme

Posters of this kind (plate 12) convey a diachronic description of the smoker's gradual decline. The characteristic feature of these posters is their depiction of the family as a device to highlight the responsibilities of the smoker, usually a young man from a wealthy background, toward his family and friends. This theme had a long history: a Cantonese painter was already depicting it in the 1840s in a work on the stages through which an opium smoker gradually falls into ruin. This smoker is presented as an heir who squanders a huge fortune through his addiction and then sells his own daughter and forces his wife to weave silk in order to support the family. The members of his family are finally reduced to extreme poverty and die.<sup>51</sup> Under the Republic, this "descent into hell" theme also served to highlight the implications of a smoker's addiction for his family and friends. Scenes of physical ruin gave way to ones of family misfortune with views of sordid home interiors.<sup>52</sup> The final result was either the infamous death of the smoker or at least the total ruin of his family accompanied by numerous signs of social disgrace: ragged clothes and loss of property and home. Posters of this type were structured not only by a chronology of ruination but also by contrasting opposites: wealth enjoyed before addiction to opium as opposed to poverty, the earlier seated or standing position as opposed to the smoker's reclining position, elegant clothing as compared with rags, and so on.

Another variation of the descent into hell theme tried to illustrate a common expression in which it was said that the smoker allowed health, family, and wealth to pass through the bowl of his pipe (*guanjin yandou li*

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and Heroin in Early Twentieth-Century Shanxi," *East Asian History* 32/33 (December 2006/June 2007): 164.

<sup>51</sup> Sir Henry Charles, *China and the Chinese: Their Religion, Character, Customs, and Manufactures* (London, 1849), vol. 1, pp. 106–115.

<sup>52</sup> See the drawing "Yapian yu jiating de xingfu" [Opium and happiness of the family], *Jinyan banyuekan* 1 (June 1936): n.p.; *Opium, a World Problem* (March 1928): 34.

*qu*,<sup>53</sup> or *cong yandou de xiaokong li...haoguang*<sup>54</sup>). This theme had varying degrees of success because the expression, while very eloquent, was not very easy to represent in pictures (plate 13).<sup>55</sup>

#### Redemption or Death

These posters (plates 14, 15) were about the smokers' obligations under the Six Year Plan: they sought to encourage smokers and their families to seek treatment. The characteristic feature of these posters is their purely dualistic approach in which they contrast a pre-treatment period with a post-treatment period. There are two variants on this theme. In the first, the smoker stops smoking thanks to treatment in a clinic (the photographic negative, so to speak, of the descent into hell, since in this case the smoker's condition before treatment is compared with his condition after healing). In the second variant, the smoker does not correct his habit and ultimately pays for it with death.<sup>56</sup>

These posters totally avoid any mention of the duration of the treatment (and its painful nature) in order to embellish the contrast between the sick people who enter a clinic and those who leave having been cured. As for the detoxification clinic itself, all that is seen is the threshold. Contrary to what one might expect, the posters show no doctors with the patients. It is as though the propaganda is playing on these clear-cut contrasts to emphasize the ease and obvious value of the treatment.

#### The Scourge of Society

These posters (plates 16, 17, 18, 19, 20) explore the consequences of opium addiction in society as a whole. This genre could be divided into two types:

The first type shows the smoker in the center while the periphery depicts the negative social consequences for the smoker when he resorts to theft and beggary.<sup>57</sup> Short of money and driven by his craving, the smoker

<sup>53</sup> Ouyang Shan, "Dutu," 664. The short story was written in 1937.

<sup>54</sup> Li Jiezhì, "How to Root Out Opium and Drugs," *GJWGJ*, 1.

<sup>55</sup> See two posters by the hygiene committee of Peking city, one reproduced in *Jinyan banyuekan* 1 (June 1936): n.p., the other kept in the Hoover Library at Stanford and reproduced in Brook, *Opium Regimes*, 16, and also the drawing "Xi yapian zhi qianhou" [Before and after opium], in *Jinyan banyuekan* 1 (June 1936): n.p.

<sup>56</sup> See the drawing "Zhongguo jieyan yiyuan" [Detox clinics in China], reproduced in *Jinyan banyuekan* 1 (June 1936): n.p., and the posters by the *Jinyan zhuankan*: 1 (June 1937): 85 and 86.

<sup>57</sup> See the drawing "Yapian yu shehui" [Opium and society], reproduced in *Jinyan banyuekan* 1 (June 1936): n.p.

becomes a nuisance to society as he resorts to every expedient in order to be able to smoke.<sup>58</sup>

The smoker is not seen in the second type of poster, which depicts society in more or less allegorical form: a child, a man, a crowd threatened by opium and possibly other drugs (morphine, red pills) embodied by creatures of two types:

- humanoid (always scrawny), a derivative of the drug addict, at once terrifying and formidable, of superhuman size with claws and fangs. It is not clear whether these humanoids embody opium or the smokers themselves—a genuine ambiguity suggesting again that the smokers are not only lost to society but are actively attacking it.<sup>59</sup>
- wild animals (tigers, snakes, bears, and so on) highlighting the enormity of the peril to society, and hence the necessity of the anti-opium combat and its heroic nature.<sup>60</sup> The choice of wild animals to embody opium prompts two observations. First, it could have echoed Lin Zexu's famous words, cherished by the anti-opium activists: "the ravages of opium surpass those of floods and wild beasts." Second, the fact that it is the serpent that figured most often in this bestiary could well reflect the influence of Western iconography and its Christian heritage in which the serpent represents evil. The first active anti-opium associations in China at the beginning of the twentieth century included many Western missionaries, working along with their Chinese helpers. It is quite possible that opium was already being represented at that time in the form of a serpent.<sup>61</sup> And while the NAOA, which published many of the posters used in this book, was a purely Chinese association, a significant number of its members were Christians.<sup>62</sup>

The meaning conveyed by these two types of representation was that opium is a de-humanizing substance that reduces an ordered society to a state of chaos. Implicitly, the smoker himself was being likened to a wild animal.

<sup>58</sup> This is demonstrated several times in the news reports of the newspaper *Yuehuabao*: 4 March 1930, 27 December 1931, 26 July 1933.

<sup>59</sup> See the cover pages of *Judu yuekan* 26 (December 1928), and 24 (October 1928).

<sup>60</sup> See the posters of the National Anti-Opium Association titled "Xieli judu" [Let us struggle together to eliminate drugs] and "Zaijie zaili" [Let us renew our efforts], reproduced in *Dang'an yu shixue* [Archives and historiography] 3 (1996): n.p.

<sup>61</sup> I have unfortunately been unable to consult a sufficient number of anti-opium posters from the years 1900 to 1920 to be able to make any firm conclusions on this point.

<sup>62</sup> Zhou, *Anti-Drug Crusades*, 45–47.



### Glorifying the Struggle against Opium

This type of poster (plates 21, 22) exalted the combat of the adversaries of opium. It highlighted the smokers and their saviors, once again putting forward a logic of opposites: vigorous and determined saviors as opposed to weak and suffering smokers. The posters also show the opium adversaries combatting the scourge of opium embodied by savage animals and monsters of the same type as in the posters of the previous category.

This kind of propaganda document, which by its very nature sought to deliver a simple and unambiguous message, came up against the thorny question of evidence. Of course, all four types of posters strove to condemn the use of opium. They relayed a favorite idea in the anti-opium documents according to which opium harmed the smoker's health, family, and society. These evocative images helped cement stereotypes such as the smoker ruining his family or sliding into delinquency, not to mention the general idea that opium was harmful to society as a whole. Historians who study opium today unfortunately do not go beyond this level of analysis and are content with illustrating their works with one or two posters, reducing them implicitly to the elementary meaning just mentioned. However, these posters are not mere substitute images or avatars intended for illiterate people who could not read the written propaganda that denounced the ravage of opium in China and among the Chinese. The analysis needs to be extended and questions must be asked about the system of representation of opium smokers that the posters convey.

### *The Hidden Meaning of the Anti-Opium Iconography*

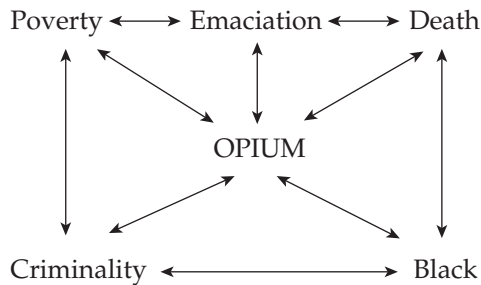
#### To Be or Not To Be...

We must ask questions about the abundance of opposing contrasts seen in this body of posters. This abundance undoubtedly expresses that, through this omnipresent game of opposition, the posters aimed above all to single out the smoker and isolate him in the most characteristic form possible. What was being attacked was the notion that opium consumption was a harmless pastime if practiced in moderation. The smoker who would take a few occasional pipes in his leisure hours without being in the least bit different from total abstainer was a dangerously ambiguous individual and, as such, ought not to exist. This also explains the remarkable reluctance to show another sort of intermediate being—the smoker under treatment. Such a person was neither wholly bad nor quite redeemed, and it was therefore hard to integrate him into this logic of radical duality.

But this was not the only meaning conveyed by these images. The smoker was assigned a set of remarkably stable features. Now, these characteristics had far wider implications than the mere “delineation” of the smoker. These implications established a network of correspondences between opium, poverty, emaciation, and death that did not rely on a rational or even conscious mental process. Instead, by contamination and association, the categories listed previously rubbed off on the opium smoker. This opium/poverty/emaciation/death nexus formed the core of what these pictures meant at the deepest level.

The purpose here, therefore, is to show how anti-opium propaganda helped create a complex system of connotations around the opium smoker that was never explicit but remarkably dense and efficient. This nexus did not stem from a properly reasoned and articulated discourse. It did not merely impart a negative image to the smoker. Rather, it sought to enclose him for once and for all in a genuine “system of pejoration,” to use a term that normally belongs to linguistics. This was not a linear list of the shortcomings associated with the smoker but a true matrix based less on a discursive logic than on a play of implications and connotations.

This system was organized in a dense framework of correspondences schematically represented as follows:



This nexus also included special relationships with criminality and the color black, but these were actually generated by media other than the illustrations used in the propaganda.

The nexus will be examined in two steps: first, we will attempt to distill the more implicit meaning conveyed by the printed posters that combined the notions of death, poverty, and emaciation to form the main equation between the smoker and the skull-man, a notion that is explained in the next section. The project to stigmatize the smoker, at its hard core, sought to hinge together the various attributes assigned to the smoker on the

concept of emaciation, in order to form a coherent system of emaciation/poverty/death/opium.

Next, we shall study the way in which this system was repeated in contemporary writings related, directly or indirectly, to smokers and attempt to shed light on the system's impact. It turns out that there was no gradual dissemination from the center, where the anti-opium arguments were concentrated and elaborated, down to the depths of Chinese society where they gradually became attenuated. The system did not get propagated about according to this "wave" model. Indeed, certain aspects of the system were adopted as a matter of preference by certain media but were neglected by others. The most characteristic example, as we will see later, was the meager success of the theme of emaciation in the Canton press: the system lost its consistency outside its matrix.

In a second stage, we will take a closer look at the secondary system, which associated the color black, the world of crime, and opium. Then, we will investigate the impact in other sectors and in the media.

#### The Skull-Man: Emaciation/Poverty/Death/Opium

*The Treatment of the Theme in the Illustrations* When a smoker began his "descent into hell," his face became hollow, he lost his belly, and he ultimately attained extremes of emaciation that his rags no longer concealed. Emaciation as part of the descent into hell signaled serious deterioration of health, approaching death, and material distress. The neologism "skull-man" designates all the representations of smokers as men "skeletonized" by the narcotic and often shown with an opium pipe, the characteristic shape of which makes them easy to recognize at first sight.

However, more generally in the posters, while extreme emaciation was not presented as the final point of the descent into hell, it was nevertheless presented as an inseparable attribute of the smoker. In the anti-opium illustrations, a smoker is always represented with the features of a skull-man. This is where it must be stressed that while the emaciation/poverty/death/opium system played the star role in anti-smoking posters under the Republic, it was not created out of nothing. On the contrary, the system inherited already existing conceptions and only took them to a higher level of organization. In other words, the propaganda illustrations did not invent the skull-man theme. The association between opium and emaciation was already old. It can be seen already, for example, in this passage from a popular song recorded by Jules Arène in the 1870s: "Think hard and stop smoking opium. Look at all these opium smokers, they resemble no human being. Do not smoke, do not smoke. When you smoke, you turn

yellow, black, thin, bereft of strength and vigor. My lover! My lover! Listen to my advice: opium smokers are wretched; their clothes are rags."<sup>63</sup>

It must be stressed, however, that when the nineteenth-century anti-smoking documents mention emaciation, it is not to single out this feature among other effects such as uncontrollable weeping, yawning, bent backs, yellowish hue, curved posture, and neglected clothing. Thus goes the description of a smoker in a song from the time of the Opium Wars: "the domed back, the bloodless face, the fleshless body...tears flowing from his eyes."<sup>64</sup> Twentieth-century propaganda gradually promoted the notion of emaciation to the rank of first attribute, which thereby became the culminating point of a twofold movement in the representation of smokers that took place in the late Qing and early Republic: emaciation prevailed over the other tokens of shame,<sup>65</sup> while becoming, at the same time, an attribute absolutely required in the representations of the opium smokers. A scrutiny of illustrated magazines from the late-Qing and Republican periods strikingly reveals the way in which the graphic theme of the famished smoker grew and became increasingly successful over time: the *Dianshizhai huabao*, published in Shanghai from 1884 and 1898, offers only a few representations of very thin smokers (plates 4, 8, 10, 11). The difference with two newspapers that came slightly later is already substantial: the *Shishi huabao* (published in Canton from 1905 to 1912) and the *Tuhua ribao* (published in Shanghai from August 1909 to August 1910) devoted proportionally far greater space to our skull-men when they depicted smokers (plates 9, 24, 25).<sup>66</sup> By the time of the Republic, the illustrated magazines had taken the final step: extreme emaciation was almost consubstantial with the opium smoker in magazines such as the *Shidai manhua* or *Lunyu* (published in Shanghai respectively in the 1935–1937 and 1932–1937 periods).<sup>67</sup> Anti-opium propaganda therefore had the merit of systematizing the use of this image and of using it with marvelous

<sup>63</sup> Jules Arène, *La Chine familière et galante* (Paris: Charpentier, 1876), 71–72. Arène gives a French rendering of the Chinese ditty.

<sup>64</sup> "Jieyan ge" [Song on the elimination of opium], *Guangning wenshi ziliao* (Guangning: Guangningxian zhengxie wenshi ziliao, 1986), vol. 6, p. 66.

<sup>65</sup> Under the Republic, smokers were shown on several occasions, especially in advertisements for anti-opium remedies, in the process of yawning or weeping: *Shenbao*, 6 March 1935; *Yugong sanrikan* 85 (ca. 1930) (plate 26).

<sup>66</sup> Cf. *Shishi huabao*, January 1907, p. 3b; April 1907, p. 13a; July 1907, pp. 12b and 13a; September 1907, p. 10a; August 1908, p. 6b; November 1909, 3b; *Tuhua ribao* 3, p. 9; 42, p. 9; 87, p. 6; 288, p. 8, and the smokers represented in each number, between numbers 341 and 390. We must mention the existence, strangely unknown to historians, of a remarkable series of fifty illustrations showing the ill effects of opium, published at the rate of one per number between editions 341 and 390 of the *Tuhua ribao*.

<sup>67</sup> *Lunyu* 91 (July 1936): 902, 924; 92, 1001.

efficiency, thereby sustaining a general movement toward closely associating opium and emaciation.

The question might be asked as to why emaciation was specially chosen over other features that could have served equally well to stigmatize the opium smoker. The question bears asking all the more because, contrary to the cliché, most smokers were not particularly emaciated.<sup>68</sup>

This choice of emaciation can be explained by the fact that its depiction had a very precise function. For the adversaries of opium, it had the advantage of branding opium consumers with the mark of extremely poor health and poverty.

As for deteriorating health, the propaganda posters very often employed simple metonymy to represent death as a skull (plates 19, 29),<sup>69</sup> a device that skillfully extended the “opium equals emaciation” equation inasmuch as extreme emaciation in the inveterate opium addict revealed the contours of his skull and announced his coming death. An advertisement for one of the numerous remedies for opium addiction that appeared in the *Shenbao* in 1935 summarized this point in the clearest terms: three representations of the same individual are shown side by side: first, a healthy man with full cheeks, then beside this image the same man weeping and emaciated by opium addiction, and finally at the far left his skull (plate 26).<sup>70</sup> The reclining position of the opium smoker had its own implications: the skull-men were reclining men, already stretched out like dead people. The reclining position associated with the somnolence that sometimes followed the consumption of opium thus reinforced the smoker’s resemblance to a corpse. The reclining position also had the advantage of explicitly signifying inactivity: in posters that illustrate the descent into hell, the first picture shows the head of the household seated or standing. Then he is shown prostrate and motionless before the consternation of his close ones (plate 12).

The omnipresence of emaciation or thinness in the anti-opium illustrations did not just make physical destitution visible. Since, for the majority of the Chinese population and especially the poorer classes, thinness seemed to be associated with poverty,<sup>71</sup> it also served to express material

<sup>68</sup> Dikötter, *Narcotic Culture*, 135–136; Paulès, “L’opium à Canton,” 375; GDJYJK, *gongdu zhaiyao*, 132–133.

<sup>69</sup> See *Judu yuekan* 45 (November 1930): cover page; *Opium, a World Problem* (November 1928): 22; *Jinyan zhuan* 1 (June 1937): 90.

<sup>70</sup> *Shenbao*, 6 March 1935. An advertisement published in 1921 in the *Minguo ribao* (16 April), following the same train of thought, shows a skeleton smoking with the usual smoker’s apparatus beside him.

<sup>71</sup> This denigration is suggested by the fact that the bad guys in the propaganda posters are always emaciated individuals. On the contrary, Carl Crow, in *Four Hundred Million*

destitution. The thin man indeed was one who did not eat enough or one whose work was arduous. The individuals in the posters who are not (or not yet) smokers are shown with full faces. They are sometimes policemen, whose clean uniforms also contrast with the smoker's rags (plates 12, 14).

In the Republican period, the theme of the emaciated opium smoker proliferated not only in the propaganda posters but also in the anti-opium writings.<sup>72</sup> However, even if the written propaganda made extensive use of emaciation to describe the opium smokers, it gave far more precise details of their health disorders, of which the pictures could not give a sufficiently clear idea. A short article in the children's section of the *Minguo ribao* dated 6 February 1930 says that the consequences of smoking opium are emaciation and different forms of brain damage.<sup>73</sup> The symptoms are described thus: "[the person's] color becomes ashen, his body gets weaker, his dependency, of which he is unaware to begin with, is soon aggravated."<sup>74</sup> Sometimes, the writings mention the transmission of opium-related defects from parents to children.<sup>75</sup>

The link between opium and poverty was placed in the context of a far more explicit moral judgment. The ruin of the smoker and his family was described as the consequence of the smoker's inertia and laziness. The written propaganda emphasized this cause-and-effect link between opium smoking and ruin through the notion of laziness. The individual who spent his time on a couch smoking became unproductive. At this point, the description would slide into a value judgment: the man was lazy.<sup>76</sup> *Heiyan honglei* (Red tears and black smoke), a propaganda play put up by the NAOA, about a rich man who abandons his family business to pass his days smoking, is typical of this move to establish inactivity as a necessary corollary of the opium smoker's condition.<sup>77</sup>

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*Customers* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1937), explains that a paunch was well considered in China. Crow reports that the porters that he hired thought they were flattering him when they spoke about his weight. A drawing in the *Banjiao manhua* (65 [10 September 1932]: 3) shows a thin man looking at himself in a magnifying mirror. The caption under the drawing is "shouren de anwei" [A thin man's consolation].

<sup>72</sup> There are numerous examples: *Judu yuekan* 77 (ca. 1933): 22, undated prospectus by the office, *GJWGJ*, 135; *YHB*, 4 November 1936; Li, "Comment supprimer radicalement l'opium et les drogues."

<sup>73</sup> The *Minguo ribao* can be considered a quasi-official mouthpiece of the Guomindang at this time. It therefore reflected the views of this party.

<sup>74</sup> Liu, "The Movement for Eliminating Drugs and National Rebirth," *GJWGJ*, 6; Radio broadcast speech by Yi Jianquan (date not specified), *GJWGJ*, 21.

<sup>75</sup> Program of the Festival against Drugs, *GJWGJ*, 138.

<sup>76</sup> Program of the Festival against Drugs, *GJWGJ*, 139.

<sup>77</sup> The full text of this play can be found in *Judu yuekan* 58 (ca. 1932): 38–47. There was

*Outside the Confines of Propaganda* The emaciation/poverty/opium/death system was at the core of the propaganda proper but went far beyond to affect many other media: periodicals, literature, and Cantonese opera.

First, the fact that pictures of skull-men were widely distributed in all kinds of publications can be gauged from a very convenient source of illustrations, *La satire chinoise, politique et sociale*, an abundant annual compilation of satirical drawings (*manhua*) from the Chinese press.<sup>78</sup> This work gives a general idea of the *manhua* of the period but unfortunately does not disclose the source of the drawings. That said, its selections clearly point to the great popularity of the “emaciated smoker” theme. Thus, for 1936, drawings of emaciated smokers and even of skeletons abound.<sup>79</sup> In the Canton publications, drawings of emaciated smokers appear in the *Guangzhou zazhi* dated 15 April 1933 and 15 June 1934 and in the magazine *Zhujiang xingqi huabao* in 1928 (plate 28). It would not be going too far to assert that the skull-man was the standard form of graphic representation of the opium smoker in Chinese magazines in the 1920s and 1930s.

The ubiquity of the skull-man theme meant that it was not limited to the illustrations. The very evocative nature of the symbol explains its deep-rootedness in the collective imagination of the time. A children’s song recorded in Peking in the 1930s strikingly reflects the impact of this image in describing the downfall of a wealthy smoker:

Through constant smoking, he ended up with nothing but skin and bone, skinny arms and a big skull. He had already smoked away a fortune of ten thousand ligatures, and he had smoked it all through the stem of his pipe.... An idea came to him: his own house. Why not sell it off room by room? First, he sold the crossbeams and then the timbers and with this money he smoked again. Now he has smoked it all away.... His life is coming to an end and he is going to appear in hell. He died in the street and there was no one to see to his body. The policeman prodded him with his truncheon to make sure that he was dead. The cat gnaws away at him, the dog bites him, and his abandoned skull is buffeted in different places.<sup>80</sup>

This text abundantly develops the skull-man theme, giving expression to every one of its implications as it moves forward: the poverty suggested

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another play with a very similar scenario published by the NAOA in 1928: Huang Jiamo, *Furong hualei* [The tears of the lotus flower] (Shanghai: Zhongghu guomin juduhui, 1928).

<sup>78</sup> This compilation was published every year between 1927 and 1936 by the Imprimerie Politique de Pékin.

<sup>79</sup> *La satire chinoise, politique et sociale* (1936): 14, 40, 51, 92, 100.

<sup>80</sup> Witold Jablonski, *Les Siao-ha(I-eu)l-yu de Pékin: Essai sur la poésie populaire en Chine* (Paris: Librairie franco-polonaise, 1935), 157–158.



by the smoker's emaciated condition becomes real, and the serious deterioration in his health culminates in a sordid death with an almost cinematographic "close-up" on the skull.

At the same time, references to the link between the opium smoker and emaciation are fairly infrequent in the written portions of the Canton dailies. This is seen, for example, in the *Yuehuabao*, in articles by journalists as well as in letters from readers, even if the idea that emaciation betrays the smoker does appear at times.<sup>81</sup> Oddly, this newspaper often mentions uncontrollable yawning as a characteristic trait of a smoker in a state of craving.<sup>82</sup> The *Yuehuabao* was much given to reporting stories of families ruined by the narcotic, the children sold away to satisfy their father's vice, linking pauperhood to opium addiction.<sup>83</sup>

These examples of a relative absence of the emaciation theme were limited. The literature of the Republican period contains many characters of extremely thin smokers such as Gao Yituo in Lao She's *Four Generations under One Roof*, who is "as scrawny as a little chicken,"<sup>84</sup> or a secondary character in a novel by Ba Jin: "He would lie on the bed of one of the sedan-chair carriers, watching, in the light of an opium lamp, a lean porter smoking his opium pipe and telling his favourite stories."<sup>85</sup>

Canton writers did not lag behind. The hero of Zhang Ziping's short story "Gongzhai weiyuan" (The commissioner of the public debt) is an opium smoker, his health ravaged by his vice, with a scrawny body and a waxen complexion.<sup>86</sup> The theme of the skeletonlike opium smoker was also much favored by the great Canton writer Ouyang Shan. His characters include many specimens from the dregs of Canton society in Republican times: "At a neighboring table, an old habitué of the brothels joined the conversation. He came daily to the Liangzhen teahouse where he would stay half the night. Such was his emaciation that it left little doubt about his being an opium smoker."<sup>87</sup>

Even if no excessively general conclusions should be drawn from this small set of examples, it remains true that the theme of the emaciated

<sup>81</sup> YHB, 15 May 1930, 4 February 1934.

<sup>82</sup> For example: YHB, 22 October 1930, 5 June 1931, 11 June 1931.

<sup>83</sup> YHB, 5 February 1930, 7 March 1930, 13 February 1931, 11 June 1935. See also XGR, 21 January 1935.

<sup>84</sup> Lao She, *Quatre générations sous un même toit* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1998), vol. 2, p. 583.

<sup>85</sup> Pa Chin, *Family*, trans. Sidney Shapiro (New York: Doubleday, 1972; reprint, Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 1989), 93.

<sup>86</sup> Zhang Ziping, "Gongzhai weiyuan," 402–403.

<sup>87</sup> Ouyang Shan, *Guichao* [The demons' den] (Shanghai: Shanghai liangyou tushu, 1936), 63. Another example is that of a rickshaw puller in a 1934 short story: "Qinian ji" [Seven years of jealousy], in *Ouyang Shan wenji*, 1:322–323.

smoker was ever present in the literary production of the times. The idea that opium consumption led to great poverty was, on the contrary, relatively rare.

The Cantonese opera, a very popular form in Republican times often dealing with very contemporary problems,<sup>88</sup> is another indicator of the skull-man nexus. Lam Fung-Shan, in his thesis on the Cantonese opera in the 1920s and 1930s, reports that opera pieces often dealt with opium consumption along with other social problems such as gambling and prostitution and that, when they did so, it was always to condemn the ravages of opium consumption.<sup>89</sup> There were even plays that gave a central place to condemning the misfortunes wrought by opium smoking. One of them, *Dumeigui* (The drugged rose), written around 1929, probably enjoyed some success since its leading roles were all played by famous actors of the day: Xue Juexian, Xinzhu, and Liao Xiahuai.<sup>90</sup> The theme of the family ruined by opium was markedly present in these plays, with the occasional poignant twist when a wife or a daughter would be sold off as a prostitute. Examples of such plays were *Yan Ruisheng* (Yan Ruisheng), *Wei-wang mengli ren* (The character from the unforgotten dream), and *Tianwang* (The infallible divine law).<sup>91</sup> These plays establish a causal link between opium and poverty; their plot follows the equally well-known theme of the Rake's Progress.<sup>92</sup> An example of such a downfall is described in the libretto *Maihua demei* (Trade a flower for a beauty), depicting Shi Fusheng, a young man with a very promising future. Shi's downfall is averted by his loving and persuasive wife, Qian Xiuying, who manages to remove him from the baleful influence of the evil and jealous Feng Zengren, a man intent on his destruction. During a spell in a detoxification clinic, Shi Fusheng manages to get weaned from the drug. The cliché of the emaciated smoker is very clearly employed in this piece. At the beginning, the hero Fuxing, who as yet keeps a distance from opium, describes smokers thus: "smokers always lack strength, thin as nails as if they have skipped ten meals one after the other."<sup>93</sup> Later, Xiuying is terrified when she sees

<sup>88</sup> Huang Jingming and Lai Bojiang, *Yueju shi* [History of the Cantonese opera] (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chuanshe, 1988), 23–37. Ho, *Understanding Canton*, 306–308.

<sup>89</sup> Lam Fung-Shan, "Er, sanshi niandai yueju juban yanjiu" [Research into Cantonese opera libretti in the 1920s and 1930s], Ph.D. thesis, Hong Kong University, 1997, 136.

<sup>90</sup> Huang Jingming, *Yueju shi*, 35.

<sup>91</sup> Lam Fung-Shan, "Er, sanshi niandai yueju juban yanjiu," 136–137.

<sup>92</sup> The title of a famous series of eighteenth-century paintings by William Hogarth (1697–1764) showing the decline and fall of a spendthrift son who squanders his family fortune on gambling and prostitution. Interestingly, the paintings later served as the subject of an opera by Igor Stravinsky first presented in Venice on 11 September 1951.

<sup>93</sup> *Maihua demei* (Canton: Shezili, n.d.), 1, quoted in Lam Fung-shan, "Er, sanshi niandai yueju juban yanjiu," 137.

her husband on their marriage day, such is his resemblance to a demon (*gui*), and she makes every effort to persuade him to stop smoking: "See the state of the opium smokers—is there a single one of them who does not have a sunken chest, a swollen belly (*jixiong goudu*), and ridiculously hunched up shoulders?"<sup>94</sup> The Cantonese opera libretti are additional pointers to the widespread prevalence of the association of poverty and emaciation with opium.

In conclusion, the theme of emaciation gradually predominated over the many shameful attributes previously attached to smokers (crying, yawning, hunched back, yellowish complexion), not only among the propaganda publications but on a wider scale. Using the theme of emaciation, the propaganda associated opium with notions of physical ruin and poverty. We have seen that this approach was relayed, though sometimes distortedly, by other media not primarily devoted to condemning opium and its uses. That such a link from opium consumption to poverty and death was established in the minds of the population through this process of visual stigmatization was a given fact whose importance cannot be overestimated.

This description of opium as it was dealt with by the propaganda must be supplemented by an examination of the ways in which, on a broader scale, the narcotic was denigrated as a factor motivating crime, not only because of the poverty that it engendered but also because of the variety of its affinities with "darkness" or "blackness."

#### Variations on the Color Black: The Links among Opium, Crime, and Blackness

It is clear from the illustrations that the propaganda directly suggested that the smoker was driven by lack of money to steal the means to purchase his drug. Certain propaganda documents followed the same line of reasoning.<sup>95</sup>

However, the association between the smoker and criminality could also be reinforced by more subtle links between opium and thinness. There is a parallel with Emile Zola's novel, *Le ventre de Paris*,<sup>96</sup> in which Zola depicts society through the thin/fat dichotomy. In the psychology of some of the novel's characters, the half-starved appearance of the hero, Florent, is heavily significant. For Lisa, the pork-shop owner's wife, the causes are clear: honest folks cannot be thin. One with a lean look is suspect (he "does not enjoy..."). He ducks and weaves, escapes the gaze of

<sup>94</sup> *Mailhua demei*, 21.

<sup>95</sup> Speech by Yi Jianquan (broadcast date not specified), *GJWGJ*, 21.

<sup>96</sup> One of its many English-language translations is titled *The Fat and the Thin* (Vizetelly, 1888).

others. His thinness suggests that he is famished, and as such ready to steal, even to kill to feed himself. In the novel, political subversion is always the business of "lean and hungry" men.

In the iconography of anti-opium propaganda, as in *Le ventre de Paris*, corpulence becomes an expression, so to speak, of social position. The illustrations showing arrests or execution willingly play on the contrast between well-fed policemen representing legality and skeletonlike smokers, in a clear attempt to associate the smokers with the fringes of society (plates 12, 14).

In the written texts, however, the relationships between crime, blackness, and opium are established first and foremost through descriptions of the opium houses, which are frequently depicted as dark and filthy dens where a disquieting darkness is seen to be propitious to communities of interlopers. The disparaging term *yanwo* (opium dens), often used to designate these places, evokes a dark and disturbing place visited most preferably by night. Accounts of visits to opium houses often compare them to hell or to a grave. Spinning out the same metaphor, they compare the smokers in these places to cadavers or to the living dead. There is one more link here between opium and death: the dark opium house is peopled with individuals who are almost dead, not only as skull-men but also because they are pleased to be in a place that evokes the tomb. A typical passage from a description in the magazine *Judu yuekan* puts it thus:

The darkness is very dense as if light has become the sworn enemy of the people who inhabit this place. In such an atmosphere, the visitor can easily believe that he is in hell or in a grave. Six or seven straw beds are arranged, each with a glass lamp about seven of eight inches tall. Two or three smokers lie on each bed and, although dressed in oriental clothes of a certain refinement, they appear to be dead men who have just emerged from their coffins.<sup>97</sup>

Ouyang Shan, too, describes a sordid opium house where the darkness and the color black are strikingly omnipresent:

It was then ten in the morning. Thick wrapping paper covered the windows. Any chink that allowed a ray of light to penetrate was closed off by a piece of black cloth, a dirty rag, or a jute sack to prevent the minutest degree of clarity from filtering through.... Over [the smokers'] heads hovered a cloud of tragic blackness. The black poison flowed in their blood. Sooner or later, even if they knew nothing of it, they would be killed.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>97</sup> *Judu yuekan* 79 (ca. 1932): 31.

<sup>98</sup> Ouyang Shan, "Dutu," 661.

A few pages later, Ouyang Shan uses the word *diyu* (hell) to designate the opium house.

The press did not lag behind in its descriptions of the disturbing opaqueness of the opium houses. Articles on visits to opium houses often mention the darkness of the place caused by dense smoke and the absence of apertures, aggravated by the noise, making the place particularly unwelcoming.<sup>99</sup>

The description of the opium houses as places of bad company also deliberately emphasizes the shifty nature of the customers.<sup>100</sup> Their darkness, the disturbing opaqueness that concealed the presence of smoke, made these places suited to every type of intrigue. The black opium houses, especially those discreet, even illegal, establishments that stayed open throughout the night, were seen to be perfect lairs for bandits.<sup>101</sup>

Beyond these features, the physical description of smokers in the anti-opium writings as *yapianguai* (opium-smoking devils), a reference to black lips and black teeth and to the fact that, like the dead and like thieves, they emerged only at midnight, shows the extent to which there existed, throughout the anti-opium discourse, special affinities among opium, obscurity, and the color black. The reason why the propaganda illustrations made rather limited use of the color black is probably related to the clarity of the drawing itself.

The anti-opium propaganda was also able to play on the fact that the day-to-day vocabulary of opium had many affinities with the color black, thus again helping to place the opium consumer in a certain "blackness." Thus, the terms commonly used to designate opium included *heimi*, "black rice," and *heitu*, "black earth." *Heiji* (community of blackness), which designated membership in the community of smokers, was very common and served to build a number of expressions such as *chenmiheiji* (to be an opium smoker), and *toushenheiji* and *chenlunheiji* (both meaning "to become an opium smoker"). Opium smoke was often called *heiyān* (black smoke), as in the title of a play dedicated to anti-opium propaganda: *Heiyan honglei* (Red tears and black smoke). Billingsley's study on bandits under the Republic also identifies the slang expression *banheilao*, or "trafficking in opium."<sup>102</sup> No color other than black was used to build expressions representing opium.

<sup>99</sup> Cf., for example, *XGR*, 21 January 1935; *YHB*, 11 June 1931, 7 January 1932, 15 January 1932, 2 February 1932, 25 June 1933.

<sup>100</sup> *Judu yuekan* 69 (ca. 1933): 35–36.

<sup>101</sup> *YHB*, 22 September 1933, 9 December 1934.

<sup>102</sup> Phil Billingsley, *Bandits in Republican China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press), 1988.

Black was opium, black were the opium houses, and, as if by contagion, the smokers in these houses were brought closer to professional criminals. Indeed, in a Chinese context, black is associated with illegality (for example, *heishi* means black market), ill-doing (*heixin*), and the universe of crime and of secret societies (*heishehui*, secret society; *heihua*, slang).<sup>103</sup> This black “coloring” of opium hence probably contributed to its more or less conscious association with the world of crime. It is, however, surprising to see that the links between organized crime (the mob) and opium consumption received relatively little treatment in the anti-opium literature. Paradoxically, the links between opium and the underworld are actually seen less in anti-opium publications than in literature, where opium consumption was a typical attribute of gangsters. In one popular example, Mao Yuan, the protagonist of the novel *Guangzhou heishehui miji*, who is both a gangster and a hero of the struggle against the Japanese occupation, in the grand tradition of big-hearted brigands from the famous novel *The Water Margin*, is an opium smoker as are his main subordinates and several other characters. The novel contains no fewer than six scenes of conversations among bandits busy smoking opium in opium houses and other places.<sup>104</sup> In the Cantonese opera too, the villains were often smokers. In the scene from the play *Dumeigui*, two evildoers who have come to kidnap the heroine discuss their plans for spending their bounty while consuming opium in an opium house.<sup>105</sup>

It must be noted that emaciation is not associated with banditry in these texts. Gangsters who smoke are never described as being thin or enfeebled by opium consumption. This point might appear to be paradoxical given the links that were seen to have existed among emaciation, social subversion, and criminality. But here, it is a world of organized high-level banditry that is being described, far from that of poor wretches forced into thieving because of extreme impoverishment. Here, on the contrary, opium consumption is detached from emaciation because these high-level criminals are seen as possessing vast reserves of physical stamina that allow them to consume the drug without being enfeebled by it.<sup>106</sup>

<sup>103</sup> *Hanyu dacidian*, 12:1322–1330. As for the “black curtain” (*heimu*) literature, it claimed that it revealed hidden mysteries on the margins of society.

<sup>104</sup> Zhong Zhongjin, *Guangzhou heishehui miji*, 10, 17, 33–34, 50, 59–62.

<sup>105</sup> Xianggang daxue Yazhou zhongxin, ed., *Xianggang daxue Yazhou yanjiu zhongxin suo-cang yueju juban* [Cantonese opera libretti from the Research Center on Asia, Hong Kong University] (Hong Kong: Research Center on Asia, Hong Kong University, 1970), vol. 7, libretti no. 70, pp. 9–10.

<sup>106</sup> An interesting parallel can be made with Iran under the Safavids, where the Shah’s capacity to imbibe huge quantities of wine raised him above common mortals: not only was he above the law, which, in the context of Islam, condemned the use of alcohol, but he also displayed his physical resistance to alcohol (Matthee, *The Pursuit of Pleasure*, 62).

The relationship between opium and crime was therefore dense and multilayered and not the expression of a simple causal link. The illustrations and the anti-opium propaganda effectively emphasized the idea that the smoker was a potential criminal. Certain narratives related smokers to the world of crime by focusing on what they presented as a biotope common to smokers and criminals, namely, the opium house. The Cantonese opera and literary works for their part more specifically linked the world of organized crime and opium consumption.

#### Successful Tagging: A Comparison with Gambling and Synthetic Drugs

The system of pejoration presented here seems to have fed into every anti-opium publication. It was not the work of one mind, or of one initiative. Nor was it the work of a single institution. However, it gave an overall structure to the mode of representation of the smoker in the propaganda.

The analysis of the anti-opium discourse and of images hostile to opium coming from those combatting the narcotic suggests that there was a matrix of representations of the smoker that can be summarized in the system of pejoration described earlier. But more than that, it is clear that the system greatly overflowed the small pool of anti-opium publications. Most often, when nonspecialized magazines and newspapers referred to smokers, they would list a few general points that were the products of this system. This cannot be surprising, since the anti-opium writings and posters themselves drew extensively from earlier modes of representation already rooted in the collective consciousness, as in the case of emaciation. Ultimately, they refined these elements and selected from them far more than they contributed to promoting radically novel opinions about opium smokers.

The importance of this other aspect of the propaganda must also be emphasized: the smoker was made *visible*, distinct, set apart, and even symbolically cut off from society as a whole.

The success of the project to stigmatize the opium smoker had never been inevitable and appears to be all the more remarkable when compared with the case of gambling, another scourge identified as such in Canton. The contrast is striking: anti-gambling propaganda never succeeded in shaming its targets to the same extent. The reason for this certainly is that gambling did not allow for this kind of *branding* or *tagging* enterprise because the gambler did not possess visual characteristics comparable to the smoker's—the reclining position and the specific paraphernalia—that made the latter so easily identifiable. The pipe was an explicit sign, which, so to speak, “overevoked” opium. The objects used for gambling, on the contrary, were far too varied, hardly typical, and above all less easily identifiable than the pipe and the opium lamp. The gamblers, therefore, could



not be clearly set apart and stigmatized in the illustrations condemning their practice.<sup>107</sup> A drawing in the *Guangzhou minguo ribao* on 31 July 1925 illustrates this difference particularly well. Allegories of gambling and opium are depicted side by side (plate 29). Opium, depicted as a skeleton carrying a pipe, a lamp, and an opium tray, is immediately identifiable. Gambling, represented by a hunchbacked, ugly, and half-starved individual holding three dogs on a leash, is particularly obscure. The artist did not have a set of attributes available for him to develop his allegory unambiguously and therefore felt obliged to label the three dogs with large characters written on their bodies: *fantan*, *baigepiao*, *huahui*, three popular gambler's games. Clearly, there existed no universally decipherable system of representation for the gambler.

The propaganda campaigns against synthetic drugs such as morphine and heroine came up against the same obstacle. They share the figure of the emaciated consumer as a constant but the characteristic opium pipe is missing as is the smoker's reclining position, and so the drawings are less clear. The syringe is far too small to be a good "marker," and it is not at all certain that it particularly evoked the consumption of drugs for the average Chinese of the time. As for drugs that were inhaled, these could easily be mistaken for ordinary cigarettes, as can be seen in two representations of synthetic drug smokers in the *Shidai manhua*,<sup>108</sup> or again in a propaganda poster posted by the Bureau of Hygiene of the city of Peking (plate 12 [bottom]).<sup>109</sup> This difference of visibility between the opium smoker and the smoker of synthetic drugs could have had some influence on the substitution of the latter for the former. One common explanation for this phenomenon is that the new drugs were seen to be more modern and fancier than opium.<sup>110</sup> Still, the question remains as to why they enjoyed a more positive image, since the process by which they replaced the existing ones could by no means be described as "natural." While consideration of costs could have played an essential role, the abandonment of opium to the benefit of these new drugs can also be explained by the success of the undertaking to stigmatize opium smokers as opposed to the consumers of synthetic drugs. This difference would substantiate the idea that opium was now seen to be out of fashion and no longer a status-conferring drug.

<sup>107</sup> Guangdongsheng jindu weiyuanhui, *Jindu gailan*, 38–39, 44, 48, 50, 56, and 79.

<sup>108</sup> *Shidai manhua* 36 (March 1937), and 39 (June 1937). In the latter case, an explanatory caption was added.

<sup>109</sup> Reproduced in *Jinyan banyuekan* 1 (June 1936): n.p.

<sup>110</sup> Frank Dikötter, "A Cultural History of the Syringe in Modern China," *Twentieth-Century China* 28, no. 1 (2002): 43, 48–50.

*The Attitude of the Population toward Opium Smokers*

The web woven around the opium smoker by anti-opium propaganda and its “system of pejoration” under the Republic was formidably efficient, all the more so as it worked on every positive attribute that opium smokers had conferred on opium. By likening smokers to wretches, it efficiently combatted an idea ever prevalent among smokers (and directly inherited from the days when it had been introduced by the elites) that taking opium was a refined practice and the expression of high social rank. Against the reputation of opium as a panacea, the image of the skull-man fostered the view that opium represented a direct path to swift death. In addition, the tagging methods employed by the propaganda meant that the smoker, necessarily a drug addict enslaved to opium, became radically isolated from “normal” individuals. It was hoped thus to kill off the notion that a consumer could be seen as a reasonable individual simply because he remained below the threshold of dependency.

The smokers, while no doubt conscious of belonging to a specific group and seen as such from outside, proved to be incapable of organizing themselves. The absence of any kind of pro-opium lobby clearly limited the possibilities of turning public opinion in favor of their ideas.<sup>111</sup> There can be no doubt whatsoever that almost everything published on opium under the Republic reflected a highly hostile attitude to the narcotic.<sup>112</sup> All told, the anti-opium pole was far more consistent and systematic in its approach. Its influence was reinforced by its wide dissemination, conveyed by well-structured organizations and encouraged by the authorities: all school-going children were taught about the scourge of opium in recent Chinese history. To the historian trawling through the archives in search of the most minute writings and expressions of anti-opium activity, the

<sup>111</sup> I must also emphasize the absence of any big private undertaking that marketed opium on a regional or national scale. On this point, the contrast is striking with the exponential growth of the cigarette market under the Republic. This was a consequence essentially of the business dynamism (expressed by unrelenting advertising) by the Nanyang company and even more by the Chinese subsidiary of the British-American Tobacco Company: Sherman Cochran, *Big Business in China: Sino-Foreign Rivalry in the Cigarette Industry, 1890–1930* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).

<sup>112</sup> For examples of how the opium question was dealt with in textbooks, see *Xiaoxue changshi keben* [Textbook for primary school] (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1933), vol. 7, pp. 4–7; *Gaoxiao lishi keben* [History textbook for middle school] (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1937), vol. 3, pp. 30–31; *Xinbian chuxiao changshi keben* [New textbook for elementary classes] (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1937), vol. 8, pp. 6–7. In addition to the normal curriculum, 3 June every year was devoted to classes on the opium question. Children took part in parades with their classes on that day (*Lunyu* 74 [November 1935]: 95–99).

anti-opium discourse seems indeed to have been ever present, well constructed, and convincing.

And yet, we cannot be sure that the campaign was a complete success, nor that the population was induced into a state of general hostility toward opium. Whether the anti-opium discourse resounded with equal force among Canton's population under the Republic remains an open question.

After all, the resources available to anti-opium propaganda were far from unlimited. In all likelihood, the great mass of Canton's population, and not just its 38 percent who were illiterate,<sup>113</sup> did not have much occasion to be exposed to this propaganda.

All in all, while the sources are fairly unanimous in saying that the elite had been won over to the view that opium was a harmful substance, the issue remained quite unclear to the mass of the population. Some of the smokers' viewpoints even seem to have spread into the population as a whole. In particular, there was fairly broad agreement on the existence of different degrees of gravity in opium consumption. There were many who took the view, in full dissonance with the anti-opium discourse, that one could be a "reasonable" consumer of opium provided that one did not become dependent on it. It is still fairly difficult to measure the indifference among the population toward occasional and supposedly "benign" consumption. Such indifference is suggested not only by the existence of the very occasional smokers situated on the boundaries between smokers and nonsmokers, but also by sundry news items about women who knew of their husband's opium consumption but took alarm only when they discovered that he was dependent on it.<sup>114</sup>

There was indeed reprobation of opium consumption, but men and women were affected by it in unequal measure. McMahon has clearly shown how, in late-Qing times, female smokers, as if made virile by the drug, were seen to endanger the traditional social order so much so that they suffered greater disapproval than did men.<sup>115</sup> Certain articles in the *Yuehuabao* suggest that this continued to be the case in the 1930s. Many

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<sup>113</sup> Guangzhoushi diaocha renkou weiyuanhui, *Guangzhoushi ershiyi nian renkou diaocha baogaoshu* (Canton, 1933). This percentage of illiterate persons (*bushizi*) must be related to the total population, including young children.

<sup>114</sup> YHB, 12 June 1931, 16 November 1931, 10 June 1935.

<sup>115</sup> McMahon, "Opium and Sexuality," 131–135. This situation fairly approaches that of the threatening figure of the female morphine addict during the Belle Époque in France: a woman of the world who is immoral and always endowed with an abnormal sexual appetite. Here, as in China, there was the same disturbed fascination with women who, it was felt, were diverted by drugs from their traditional and primarily maternal function (Yvoret, *Les poisons de l'esprit*, 141).

women arrested for illegal opium consumption and on their way to a police station would hide their faces in shame before hostile crowds.<sup>116</sup> Again, the mass of opium-related news items that appeared in this same newspaper from 1930 to 1936 suggests that reports about female smokers (*nüdaoyou*) were deemed to particularly newsworthy. The headlines always signaled the arrested person's gender if it was female: *juqu lüzhong zhi nüdaoyou* (female smoker arrested in hotel), *funü xiyan beiju zhi langbei* (embarrassed woman arrested while smoking opium), *nüdaoyou bibu* (female opium smoker evades arrest).<sup>117</sup> At the same time, there do not seem to have been any headlines about other subgroups, such as "wealthy smokers," "young smokers," "old smokers," and so on.

Cases of men who showed particular embarrassment when arrested were rarely mentioned. They were reported only among the members of certain professions such as teachers. Opium consumption in the teachers' ranks appears to have been the target of special opprobrium. As an article in the *Canton Gazette* put it, teachers were supposed to set an example.<sup>118</sup> Hu Hanmin, in his speech to the national conference on opium in 1928, said that smoking opium was a particularly serious fault among certain categories of the population, first and foremost students and teachers who were bearers of knowledge and therefore supposed to be aware of their misconduct.<sup>119</sup>

Teachers apart, there is no mention in the press of male smokers being jeered at by crowds, and even the *Yuehuabao* adopted a disapproving tone in a report on the humiliating treatment inflicted by the police who, on a particular day in 1934, made smokers of smuggled opium wear ridiculous clothes and paraded them in the streets.<sup>120</sup>

Another interesting trend can be seen from the Canton press reports. When arrested for illegally consuming opium, women would, with troubling regularity, justify their action with the unconvincing claim that they had been obliged to take opium as a cure for illness.<sup>121</sup> The fact that it was

<sup>116</sup> YHB, 10 May 1930, 18 October 1930, 5 June 1931.

<sup>117</sup> The headlines are taken from the *Yuehuabao*, 10 May 1930, 5 June 1931, 1 February 1934. There were many other headlines of this type, in this and other newspapers: *Huaguobao*, 23 December 1913, 26 January 1915.

<sup>118</sup> YHB, 6 March 1932; *Canton Gazette*, 30 May 1934.

<sup>119</sup> Hu Hanmin, speech before a conference in November 1928, in *Zhongguo Guomindang zhongyan zhixing weiyuanhui xuanchuan buyin, Jinyan xuanchuan huikan*, 27.

<sup>120</sup> YHB, 10 March 1934.

<sup>121</sup> YHB, 5 June, 26 October, 4 December, and 31 December 1931, 9 September 1933, 9 March 1934. The consumption of opium for medicinal purposes cannot of course be ruled out in principle. It is the general picture (the presence of prostitutes, gambling, and alcohol) discovered by the policemen when they made certain arrests that prompts doubt as to the veracity of the medical explanation.

women who put forward this type of excuse does not mean that indulgence toward therapeutic consumption did not apply to men.<sup>122</sup> It is just that, not only did the newspapers take a far greater interest in clandestine consumption by women, but these women were also more frequently surprised in the act of illegal consumption since they were forbidden to enter the opium houses, whereas men could always go there without even needing a permit.

In the same way, in the spring of 1937, when the new anti-opium authorities required Canton smokers to fill in registers in the opium houses, stating inter alia their reasons for smoking, they all wrote "illness."<sup>123</sup> These clues therefore suggest that the public tended to be more indulgent toward opium consumption for therapeutical purposes than toward smoking purely for pleasure.

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It is clear that there was a great imbalance between the pro-opium and anti-opium poles of opinion. The anti-opium side was able to broaden its audience through consummate skill in the use of images. It made prevalent the idea that there were specific links between opium consumption, death, poverty, and crime. The opium smoker, branded by the shameful mark of extreme emaciation, was set apart from the rest of the population. The possibility of being an occasional smoker not dependent on the drug was completely eliminated. The value system of the opium smoker was feebly articulated in the face of this wall of propaganda. More than the value attached to refinement in the act of smoking and the celebration of human relationships among opium lovers, the essential creed of the smokers was that the pleasures of smoking did not necessarily lead to dependency but that it was possible to remain "a reasonable consumer." While the public was penetrated by the notion of shame attached to opium smoking, it remained nevertheless receptive to a *nuanced vision* of opium consumption that existed among the smokers themselves and not only made a distinction between dependent smokers and "reasonable" smokers but also showed subtle degrees of indulgence according to gender, profession, and the motive for consumption. It was in its leveling approach, its all-or-nothing logic that designated all smokers as dependent

<sup>122</sup> It has already been noted that, in the first half of the nineteenth century, those who flouted edicts against opium consumption would try to escape capital punishment by claiming that their consumption was motivated by medical necessity: David Bello, *Opium and the Limits of Empire: Drug Prohibition in the Chinese Interior, 1729–1850* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 26–27, 138n68.

<sup>123</sup> *Judu yuekan* 110 (March 1937): 21–22.

individuals equally failing in their duty toward country and family that the anti-opium propaganda probably met with a measure of failure.

The main point, however, is the profound influence in society of this very dense and universal system of representation (accessible even to illiterate individuals) that was disseminated widely and well beyond the confines of the anti-opium propaganda of the times. This system probably contributed to the decline of opium consumption by establishing an association, in the minds of the people, between the smoker and an impressive string of misfortunes, notably the crucial association between the smoker and poverty. In human societies, when individuals even mistakenly consider certain situations to be real, then these situations become real in their consequences.<sup>124</sup> This means that if there exists a certain consensus (whether imposed by propaganda or not is of little importance) according to which smokers come from the lowest levels of society, then the strata situated above these levels will tend to abstain from smoking, further reinforcing a situation where the population of smokers acquires the characteristics that public opinion gives it and where, ultimately, belief increasingly fits reality just as reality fits belief.

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<sup>124</sup> Robert Merton, *On Social Structure and Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 183.

## An X-ray of the Opium Smoker

Some liberties must be taken with the appointed time frame of this book since the sources used for our study of the population of opium smokers go beyond its terminal date of July 1936. They include documents produced by the Canton City Opium Suppression Office (Guangzhoushi jinyan weiyuanhui) set up by the Guomindang authorities on 28 September 1936, shortly after their return to Guangdong Province. This committee, responsible for applying the Six-Year Plan in Guangdong—it was already being applied in the rest of the country—required all smokers to register with the authorities. In March 1937, it opened up a detoxification clinic, the Guangzhoushi jieyan yiyuan, which published a report in June 1937 containing statistics on a thousand patients treated since its inception. Another report used in this chapter comes from a comparable clinic, the Guangdong jinyan liuyisuo, which was opened under Japanese occupation by the collaborationist government in January 1941.<sup>1</sup>

The only sources available in numbers sufficient to give a picture of the smokers in their different aspects are from the 1930s. For the preceding decades, the information is far too scanty to chart any precise diachronic development, but it nevertheless allows some light to be shed on certain particularly important changes that came about between the end of the nineteenth century and the 1930s.

### The Silhouette of an Object

#### *What Was an Opium Smoker?*

The term “opium smoker” appears to be self-evident but conceals a problem—that of its rigorous definition—which is clearly full of implications

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<sup>1</sup> The name of the institute could mistakenly give the impression that it received patients from the entire province and not just from Canton. However, the data on patients, examined case by case, shows that they were all Cantonese.



for the present study. When the sources do try to estimate the number of smokers, they do not consider any cutoff level at which an individual would be considered to be a smoker rather than a simple noninitiate. This point raises the question of a continuum between the population of smokers and that of nonsmokers and of how to classify, for example, an individual who might smoke a pipe from time to time to keep company with his friends.

We have seen that opium consumers themselves maintained a fairly clear boundary between smokers and addicts, the latter being a subgroup. However, while these two habitual terms, opium smoker and opium addict, do point to a clear internal boundary, the Canton press on the contrary tended to equate the two categories. The various terms (*furongxianzi*, *yanjunzi*, *zhuangshi*, *xian*, *yangui*, *daoyou*, *heijizhongren*, *chenlunheiji*) that designated smokers in the publications of the period in no way differentiate between levels of consumption. In particular, there is a remarkable absence of any specific word to define the occasional smoker. Interestingly, an article in the *Yuehuabao* on 21 November 1931 describes the way in which certain categories of clients deserted the opium houses when the *yanhua* were banned from them. It was the presence of these ladies rather than opium itself that had drawn these customers in the first place. Here the writer could think of no specific term to designate such customers and resorted to an impromptu paraphrase: *feizhengshi daoyou* or “unofficial smokers.”

The terms used often evoked addiction, or else they would express a metaphor likening smokers to “ethereal” beings. The press would ironically contrast the world of smokers with that of ordinary human beings as if they were describing an opposition between the sacred (*xian*) and the profane (*fan*).<sup>2</sup> While these terms did not directly refer to addiction, they clearly likened smokers to beings set apart from the rest of the population. Beyond the terminology, the articles and news items in the *Yuehuabao* never refer to degrees of dependency as such: they always describe it as being very high. There is almost no mention of a so-and-so who might be a moderate smoker. In short, the press adopted wholesale the preferred “aggregative” view of the anti-opium propaganda in which the smoker was entirely identified with the drug addict. More broadly, the available sources tend to look on all smokers, even modest and irregular consumers, as being dependent on opium so as to contrast them more effectively with the rest of the population. This definition extended well beyond the

<sup>2</sup> Among many examples, see articles in the *Yuehuabao* dated 5 August 1931, 21 December 1931, and 2 and 4 February 1932.

ranks of true opium addicts and tended to encompass even the occasional smokers.

*Amounts Consumed and Dependency*

Against this backdrop, the daily quantities that the large majority of the patients who entered the clinic in 1937 claimed to be smoking are striking in their extreme moderation. The average was 4.2 grams per day, and actually more than half of them claimed to smoke less than 1 *mace* (a tenth of a *liang*, or 3.8 grams), representing about half a dozen pipes.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, this is the only data available on quantities consumed. According to one person who lived in Canton under the Republic, a “normal” smoker would consume 1 *mace* per day.<sup>4</sup> Even if the notion of a “normal smoker” obviously raises difficulties, this firsthand report nevertheless corroborates the orders of magnitude given by the clinic. These figures are worth comparing with those obtained from fifty smokers treated by the Medical Missionary Society’s Hospital in Canton in 1879, who consumed an average of 13.5 grams daily. Of these fifty patients, only two claimed to smoke less than 1 *mace* per day.<sup>5</sup> It would be very rash to conclude from these figures that the next sixty years saw a genuine transformation of modes of consumption. The Missionary Hospital could obviously receive only voluntary patients, which meant that only smokers aware of their heavy dependency and wishing to be free of it would come in. A nondependent smoker would have no problem in stopping his habit and would therefore have no need to enter a clinic. The vast majority of the patients in the clinic in 1937, on the contrary, were under compulsion to take treatment, and a large number were not dependent or did not consider themselves to be so. Here, even if the parameter of dependency must be assessed on the basis of not only the type of opium consumed but also each patient’s physiological characteristics, which meant that dependency did not necessarily appear at the same daily level of consumption for every smoker, the fact remains that the threshold of 1 *mace* per day seems to have been the norm. Thus, if all the patients in 1879 are assumed to have been dependent, we can see that only two of them claimed to be smoking less than 1 *mace* per day and six claimed to be smoking exactly 1 *mace* per day.

Given that half of the patients in 1937 smoked less than 1 *mace* daily, a plausible dependency threshold, we must assume that the majority of them were not truly dependent. This inference is fairly well supported

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<sup>3</sup> GJYN, statistical part, 8.

<sup>4</sup> Ho, *Understanding Canton*, 120. A journalist arrived at the same estimate: XGR, 14 June 1935.

<sup>5</sup> Maritime Customs, special series no. 4, *Opium* (Shanghai, 1881).

by the fact that smoking circles, as we have seen earlier, themselves took precautions against dependency. Still, the inference must be treated with some caution because it is possible that the patients of the clinic could have, deliberately or otherwise, underestimated their own consumption.

*Smokers as a Proportion of the Total Population*

Few contemporary observers concerned with this question ventured into the admittedly very difficult task of assessing the number of smokers in Canton's population during this period. Among those who did, there was the *Xianggang gongshang ribao*,<sup>6</sup> which, citing an official of the new opium administration in December 1936, put forward a figure of eighty thousand, while another newspaper, the *Xunhuan ribao*,<sup>7</sup> relying very probably on information from the same organization, gave a figure in the range of seventy to eighty thousand. The June 1937 report of the detoxification clinic opened by the Guomindang put the figure at forty thousand.<sup>8</sup> Around the same time, the *Judu yuekan* put forward a figure of thirty thousand.<sup>9</sup>

The 1936–1937 census of opium smokers stands apart from these intuitive estimations. In May 1937, after a succession of repeated grace periods, the final figures showed a total of 21,721 registered smokers.<sup>10</sup> This was really a minimum, not only when seen against the previous estimates but also because the figures of this count were obviously too small, especially in peripheral districts such as Dongshan or Huadi.<sup>11</sup> It is also clear that many smokers were tempted to avoid registration in the hopes of procuring cheaper supplies from the black market. At the beginning of 1937, many smokers were being stopped for questioning and forced to register—997 from March to June 1937.<sup>12</sup> Others, more fortunate, remained in a state of tranquil illegality. This general tendency to avoid being registered and counted is but one more major shortcoming that characterized the counting process in certain districts. There was another phenomenon: in general, and contrary to what might have been suggested by the anti-opium writings, opium smokers acted like rational consumers. In particular, they were capable of reducing or even stopping consumption when circumstances required it.<sup>13</sup> In the autumn of 1936, faced with the prospect

<sup>6</sup> XGR, 10 December 1936.

<sup>7</sup> Xunhuan ribao, 29 December 1936.

<sup>8</sup> GJYN, 2.

<sup>9</sup> Judu yuekan 113 (June 1937): 16.

<sup>10</sup> GJWGJ, 16.

<sup>11</sup> For example, the Huadi neighborhood had only one smoker registered for a population of more than 15,000 (GJWGJ, appendixes, 3).

<sup>12</sup> GJWGJ, 18.

<sup>13</sup> Ho, *Understanding Canton*, 125–126.

of compulsory registration, the simplest response available to the smoker could well have been just to abandon his drug. An opium-house manager interviewed in November 1936 feared that many occasional smokers might prefer to give up opium rather than comply with the new regulations.<sup>14</sup> He was probably not wrong, and it is important to note that the two estimates of approximately eighty thousand smokers date from the end of 1936 at the outset of the count, while the estimates of thirty to forty thousand smokers are from mid-1937. The difference between these two figures could reflect some disinclination toward opium among a section of the smokers (especially the most occasional ones) following the resolve displayed by the authorities during the first months of 1937.

It therefore seems likely that the number of regular smokers in the mid-1930s was closer to thirty to forty thousand than to eighty thousand.

If there were roughly 40,000 smokers, and if Canton's population at the end of the 1930s was 1.189 million, then we can conclude that 3.36% of the city's population smoked opium. This estimate suggests that the impact of opium consumption on Canton in the mid-1930s was not very alarming.

The percentage of smokers in the population of Canton had in all likelihood been far greater in the 1890s. The questionnaire put out by the Royal Commission on Opium in 1894 contained questions on the proportion of smokers in the population. The various categories that testified (diplomats, doctors, foreign missionaries, smokers, and Chinese civil servants) naturally gave different estimates, but most of them felt that at least 60 percent of adult males were smoking.<sup>15</sup> At a conservative estimate, this figure of 60 percent would have amounted to 15 percent of the total population and was far more impressive than that obtained in 1937.

This contingent of smokers was considerably reduced during the Ten-Year Plan. Thus, in the 1910 annual medical report of the Canton station,<sup>16</sup> Dr. Dupuis noted that the number of permits issued to smokers in Canton in that year went up to twenty thousand from ten thousand in the previous year, an increase that he saw as a consequence of greater police vigilance. This number of twenty thousand smokers registered under real duress amounts to 2.8% of Canton's total population, which was then about 700,000,<sup>17</sup> a proportion appreciably greater than the 1.83% corresponding to smokers registered in 1936–1937. However, in 1909, the International

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<sup>14</sup> YHB, 20 November 1936.

<sup>15</sup> Royal Commission on Opium, *Report*, 216–228. According to the *Report of the International Opium Commission* (63), at the beginning of the twentieth century, a third of the adult male population was smoking opium.

<sup>16</sup> MAE, Nouvelle série, Sous-série Chine, file no. 650.

<sup>17</sup> According to Edward Rhoads, "Merchants Associations in Canton," 97, the population of the city was approximately 0.6 million at the beginning of the century. In 1921, it was

Opium Commission estimated the proportion of smokers in Canton at 10 percent of the adult male population,<sup>18</sup> which would suggest that the figures of the 1910 count were fairly close to the real number of smokers at the time—again, if we take it that the great majority of opium consumers were male adults, and that male adults in general amounted to about a third of the city's total population. This similarity between registration figures and real figures had probably been far greater in 1910 than it was in 1937. Of course, much caution is needed here, since there is very little data for this earlier period. However, the impression given by the data is that there was no drastic difference between the proportions of Canton's opium smokers in 1910 and in the mid-1930s: in both instances, it was in all likelihood below 5 percent. Leaving aside the possibility of very sharp, short-term variations, this similarity between the two dates casts doubt on the notion that there could have been a serious "relapse" in the intervening years as a result of political disorder. Of course, in the absence of sources, we cannot rule out the possibility of an upward curve in number of smokers followed by a downturn—a trend that would obviously be unknown to the historian precisely because of this lack of sources but was probably very unlikely. The 1910–1923 period was marked primarily and on the whole by anti-opium policies. The only time when there could have been a spectacular increase in the number of smokers was therefore between 1923 and 1935 when policies restricting consumption were abandoned. Thus, while there are certainly grounds for assuming that there could have been a significant revival of opium consumption in these intervening years, the fact is that, had such a revival occurred, there is no explanation as to why it should have returned to 1910 levels thereafter. After all, the years 1923–1935 saw no major change in opium policy on the part of the Canton authorities. In any case, had there been a major revival of opium consumption, the diplomatic sources would very probably have mentioned it, and they are totally silent on the numbers of smokers. The few extant annual reports (for the years 1927, 1928, and 1935) of the French medical station in Canton make just one laconic observation: "opium addiction is widespread."<sup>19</sup>

If we look at the long term, it was during the 1906 Plan that real quantitative change came about. Canton then moved in full tandem with a

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estimated at 0.788 million. It would therefore be logical to take the figure of 0.7 million as an order of magnitude for 1910.

<sup>18</sup> International Opium Commission, *Report of the International Opium Commission*, 63.

<sup>19</sup> Nantes, Pékin, Série A, file no. 195, Annual Report of the Canton Consular Medical Station for 1935, no. 449b, Report of the Canton Consular Medical Station for 1927, Report of the Canton Consular Medical Station for 1928.

nationwide trend toward a reduction in the numbers of smokers.<sup>20</sup> And this very change that came about in 1906 does not seem therefore to have been fundamentally reversed in the following twenty years, even if there was a climate that generally favored the resumption of smoking.

## The Identity of the Smokers

### *Their Age*

There are two essential sets of data available here. The first consists of information on the ages of the 171 smokers treated in December 1941 in a clinic founded in the same year (the average age at the clinic in 1942 was 38.6 years). The second set contains information on the distribution by age group of 1,128 patients of the clinic in 1937. We can see that the great majority of the population in both institutes was in the 25 to 45-year-old age group, constituting 73.4% of the patients of the clinic in 1937 and 80.7% of the patients in 1941. Figure 2 shows these results in relation to the age structure of Canton's male population according to the 1928 count of opium smokers. The figure shows that the concentration of smokers in the 25–45 age bracket was in no way related to the age structure of the overall male population of the city.

If we go by these data, young adults were particularly unrepresented among smokers. Elderly persons too appear to have been not particularly receptive to the drug. It is also true, however, that these elderly persons tended to evade treatment. This can be seen in the data on the 171 patients of the clinic in 1941. While the total number of patients who had been brought to the clinic by force was 18.1% of the whole, the figure rose to 28% for patients over fifty but fell to 5.2% for the under thirties.<sup>21</sup> The striking under-representation of youth in the clinics cannot therefore be explained by any particular reluctance to obtain treatment in public view.

Other sources confirm the predominance of the 25–45 age group among the smokers. In the 1936–1937 count, which too had a distribution by age group, the 30–45 bracket alone represented 63.3% of registered smokers.<sup>22</sup> Again, of the 111 individuals reported by the *Yuehuabao* (along with their

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<sup>20</sup> International Opium Commission, *Report of the International Opium Commission*, 74–77; MAE, Nouvelle série, Sous-série Chine, file no. 589, report by De Margerie, French ambassador in China, addressed to the minister of Foreign Affairs, dated 12 October 1910. This document provides a critical synthesis of reports on the results of the anti-opium policy sent by viceroys and provincial governors to the throne.

<sup>21</sup> Guangdong jinyan liuyisuo, *Guangdong jinyan liuyisuo chengli*, 27–40.

<sup>22</sup> GJWGJ, statistical part, 5–6. It is not possible to obtain figures for the 25–45 group except from the clinics. This is because of an unfortunate “under-thirties” category in the registration process.



Figure 2. Comparison between the Agewise Structures of Patients of the Detoxification Clinics (1937 and 1941) and the Agewise Structure of Canton's Male Population (1928)

*Note:* The comparison with Canton's male population is warranted by the fact that the inmates of the two clinics were almost exclusively (99% and 97.1%) males.

*Sources:* GJYN, *Guangdong jinyanliuyisuo*, *Guangdong jinyanliuyisuo chengli yi zhou nian jinian tekan* [Special edition to commemorate the first anniversary of the foundation of the Guangdong detoxification clinic] (Canton, 1942), and *Guangzhoushi shizhengfu tongjigu*, *Guangzhoushi zhengfu tongji nianjian* [Statistical yearbook of the Canton municipal government] (Canton: Guangzhoushi shizhengfu, 1929).

ages) as having been stopped and questioned for opium-related offenses between 1930 and 1936, 64.9% were from the 25–45 age group. Firsthand accounts from the period confirm the information in the written sources, especially concerning the low representation of youth.<sup>23</sup> That these different sources converge so clearly buttresses the validity of an observation

<sup>23</sup> Interviews with Mr. Liu Ming on 5 October 2005, Madam Huang Caijuan on 7 July 2006, and Madam X on 11 July 1906.



that flies in the face of conventional laments about vast numbers of youth succumbing to the deadly charms of opium.<sup>24</sup>

However, at the end of the nineteenth century, witnesses before the Royal Commission on Opium never mentioned a particular concentration of smokers in any specific age group. None of the reports especially speaks of a lower proportion of smokers among young adults.<sup>25</sup>

The impression that there was an aging of the smoking population between the end of the nineteenth century and the 1930s is reinforced by the fact that the average age of the 50 patients of the detoxification clinic opened by John Kerr in 1879 was 35.4 years (as compared with 38.6 in the 1941 clinic).<sup>26</sup> Here, too, it can be assumed that the turning point came after 1906 since, according to sources around 1910, it was above all youth who were moving away from opium.<sup>27</sup>

### *Reasons for Smoking*

It is quite clear that not only were there numerous motives that could push an individual to smoke opium,<sup>28</sup> but also that these motives could change over a smoker's lifetime. That said, contemporary observers singled out two general reasons for smoking: pleasure and therapeutic use. This dichotomy can be seen at work in the 1937 clinic where patients on admission had to state their reasons for smoking. The questionnaire they had to fill in offered only two choices: "illness" and "amusement." Hu Han-min took the same view in a speech in 1928: "there are two reasons why ordinary people smoke: firstly, because opium is a distraction. Secondly, because it can be considered to be a medicine." One big question about this choice between pleasure and therapy came from the use of opium by coolies as a stimulant. Was such use for pleasure or for therapy? It is probable that the responses differed even among contemporaries.<sup>29</sup>

The idea that opium consumption was above all related to therapeutic use is cherished by those historians who seek to downplay the ravages of

<sup>24</sup> XGR, 20 June 1935; YHB, 15 January 1932, 4 February 1932, and 27 July 1934. H. G. W. Woodhead, *The Truth about Opium in China* (Shanghai: Mercury Press, 1931), 30–32.

<sup>25</sup> Royal Commission on Opium, *Report*, 216–228.

<sup>26</sup> Maritime Customs, special series no. 4, *Opium*.

<sup>27</sup> International Opium Commission, *Report of the International Opium Commission*, 74; MAE, Nouvelle série, Sous-série Chine, file no. 587, report by the French consul in Canton on 13 February 1908; no. 650, annual medical report of the Canton Station for 1909; no. 589, report dated 12 October 1910 by De Margerie, French ambassador in China.

<sup>28</sup> For detailed descriptions of the reasons for opium consumption, see Qingbao Zhu, *Yapian yu jindai Zhongguo* [Opium and contemporary China], 159–163 and 173–183, and Newman, "Opium Smoking," 776–778.

<sup>29</sup> Given the scale of the phenomenon, we can understand why the data on the proportion of smokers who smoked for therapeutic reasons often highly diverged.

opium by considering the physical deterioration of opium smokers to be actually a preexisting condition that they hoped to cure or at least alleviate through the drug.<sup>30</sup> However, in approaching this question, we must bear in mind one factor that could have distorted the smokers' responses: the use of illness as a pretext.

As we saw in the last chapter, there is evidence to support the view that opium consumption for therapy was far less disapproved of than smoking for pleasure. One would have therefore expected smokers to claim that they had taken to their habit because of illness even if that were not true. The fact, however, is that almost 74 percent of the patients at the detoxification institute in 1937 said that they had started smoking for pleasure (*wannong*).<sup>31</sup> This suggests that pleasure was the preponderant reason for opium consumption.

Many articles in the *Yuehuabao* referring to opium houses begin with a small introduction in which the author justifies his visit to an opium house by explaining that, while not a smoker himself, he had gone there under pressure from a friend.<sup>32</sup> This little refrain of questionable sincerity nevertheless has the merit of showing how people could be led to try opium in establishments that offered many attractions.

### *A Huge Gender Imbalance*

Any study of the proportion of women among opium smokers must keep in mind the special disapproval to which female smokers were subjected. The figures on the percentage of women in the two detoxification clinics must therefore be viewed with caution. Only 0.97% of the patients in the 1937 clinic were women (2.9% in the 1941 clinic).

If these figures are compared with those of Hong Kong, where smokers were not subjected to compulsory treatment, the absence of this constraint would seem to have encouraged women to go without treatment since Tung Wah Hospital received not a single female smoker among the 842 patients who went there for detoxification in 1934 and 1935.<sup>33</sup> In all likelihood, then, women resisted taking treatment in a clinic and thus making

<sup>30</sup> Newman, "Opium Smoking," 776.

<sup>31</sup> *GJYN*, statistical part, 5. The remaining 26 percent claimed to have started consuming opium in order to relieve pain. Among them, stomach pains, cough, and venereal diseases were the three main reasons.

<sup>32</sup> See 7 January and 2 and 11 February 1932.

<sup>33</sup> *Report of the Government of Hong Kong for the Calendar Year 1935 on the Traffic in Prepared Opium*, *Report of the Government of Hong Kong for the Calendar Year 1934 on the Traffic in Prepared Opium* (Hong Kong: Noronha and Cie). However, a report by the French consul in Hong Kong in 1929 put the proportion of women who smoked at 1 or 2 percent: MAE, SDN/LON series, Sous-série secrétariat général, no. 1642, report by the French Consulate in Hong Kong on the question of opium in Hong Kong, dated 12 December 1929.

public their status as smokers. Moreover, women, perhaps for reasons of convenience, were more reluctant than men to spend time outside their homes during treatment.

A comparison with hospitals in Shanghai during the same period raises questions about the low figures for Canton. In Shanghai, indeed, at the end of 1936, women represented 17.5% of smokers registered and 11.6% of the 2,207 patients of a temporary detoxification clinic opened at the beginning of the 1930s.<sup>34</sup> Even though these figures point to a smaller proportion of women among the patients, they are still surprisingly higher than those of the Cantonese clinics.

The figures from the Canton clinics are borne out by the firsthand reports from the period that unanimously assert that women never smoked (not one claimed to know a female opium smoker in his or her inner circle).<sup>35</sup> In addition, most of the patients (86.7%) of the institute in 1937 were brought there by compulsion, which should have given a fairly representative proportion of women, despite their wish to avoid public treatment.<sup>36</sup> The fact is that, among the 171 patients of the 1941 clinic, for each of whom we have personal information (enabling cross-checks between gender and mode of entry into the clinic), women were more highly represented among patients brought in by compulsion. The relative overrepresentation of women (who, it might be recalled, represented 2.9% of the total number of patients) among persons brought in by compulsion for treatment in neighborhood police stations and by the opium bureau is noteworthy: they numbered respectively 2 out of 30 (6.6%) and 2 out of 31 (6.4%),<sup>37</sup> although the smallness of the sample obviously limits its scope.

Besides, the fact is that patients “brought in by compulsion” were very largely unregistered smokers brought in from opium houses, where it was much easier to take them by surprise. And we know that female smokers were banned from the opium houses after 1932 and generally smoked at home. They were thus less easy to spot, less likely to be stopped and questioned, and therefore less likely to be forced into treatment.

Since these women had little inclination to take voluntary treatment and because they were less likely to be arrested and led by force to the clinic, the percentage of women among the total numbers treated at the two clinics was certainly below the true figure.

There is another indicator that does not challenge the fact that women constituted a far smaller proportion of the smokers but at the same time

<sup>34</sup> Su Zhiliang, *Zhongguo dupin shi*, 333; *Jinyan zhuankan* 1 (June 1936): n.p.

<sup>35</sup> Interviews on 5 October 2005, 7, 10 and 11 July 2006, and 15 July 2008. Given the disapproval that female smokers suffered, we cannot rule out the possibility of self-censorship.

<sup>36</sup> *GJYN*, statistical part, 1.

<sup>37</sup> Guangdong jinyan liuyisuo, *Guangdong jinyan liuyisuo chengli*, 30–40.

provides an appreciably subtler view: the figures for arrests for opium-related offenses in 1932<sup>38</sup> show that of fifty-six persons arrested, five (8.9%) were women.<sup>39</sup> This data covers both smuggling (clandestine transportation and sales) and consumption. Still, the fact remains that the majority of arrests for opium-related offenses were of persons involved in illicit consumption, assuming that a report drafted by the Canton police in 1922<sup>40</sup> held true for the years 1931–1932 as well. According to this report, 80 percent of opium-related offenses concerned illicit consumption and only 20 percent concerned the sale of smuggled opium.<sup>41</sup>

Given the excessively tenuous nature of the data from the detoxification clinic, this figure of 8.9% for women arrested in 1922 is a more plausible estimation of the real percentage of women among Canton smokers despite the observation that the women's preference for home consumption made them less likely to be arrested. Besides, this figure of 8.9% was not very far removed from the proportion (around 6.5%) of women among persons taken by compulsion to the clinic in 1941.

Taking 8.9% as a possible order of magnitude, and also accounting for the fact that the Canton population at this time consisted of about 140 men for 100 women,<sup>42</sup> we can surmise that women smokers were seven times fewer than men. Once the overrepresentation of men in Canton's population is taken into account, we get a ratio of  $8.9 \times 1.4 = 12.46$  women for 91.1 men, or 7.3 times fewer women.

Apart from the social disapproval that specifically affected women smokers,<sup>43</sup> there are other explanations for why women tended to smoke less. For example, they were less likely to visit places of pleasure (brothels, gambling dens, not to mention the opium houses themselves) where one would be initiated into opium. Besides, we have seen in the first chapter

<sup>38</sup> Guomin zhengfu zhujichu tongjiju, *Zhonghua minguo tongji tiyao* [Statistical summary of the Republic of China] (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1935), 423.

<sup>39</sup> Although the sample was small, this figure of 8.9% is remarkably similar to that of the national data for criminals arrested for opium-related offenses in 1931: 2,380 women out of a total of 27,435 arrests (giving 8.7%): Guomin zhengfu zhujichu tongjiju, *Zhonghua minguo tongji tiyao*, 165.

<sup>40</sup> *Minguo ribao*, 14 February 1922.

<sup>41</sup> The veracity of this assumption that offenses related to consumption occupied a preponderant place in the total number of opium-related offenses is borne out in the nationwide figures given by the *Judu yuekan* for the years 1926 (70%), 1927 (77%), 1928 (83.3%), and 1930 (66.7%): 35 (November 1929) and 55 (May 1932).

<sup>42</sup> Guangzhoushi zhengfu tongjigu, *Guangzhoushi zhengfu tongji nianjian*, 53. It must be noted that this gender imbalance in urban populations was a constant during the period, with an average of 143 men to 100 women in China's six biggest cities in 1928; cf. Benshu bianjibu, *Zhongguo jingji nianjian* [Economic yearbook of China] (Shanghai: Benshu bianjibu chubun, 1934), part C, p. 32.

<sup>43</sup> See chapter 6.

that expenditure on the regular consumption of opium or even *yantiao* in a poor family's budget was anything but negligible and could be tolerated only if smoking was limited to one member of the family. Thus, women married to coolies who used the drug to sustain them in their exhausting work, the mainstay of the home, would jeopardize the survival of the family if they consumed opium as well. Necessity sometimes became the mother of virtue.

### *Smokers and the Social Hierarchy*

Here again the 1937 report by the clinic is a source of great value,<sup>44</sup> both because of the scale of the sample and because it gives an occupation-wise distribution of the patients. Now, after making a few adjustments to allow for difference in categories, this information can be cross-checked with data on the male adult population from the 1928 Canton census.<sup>45</sup> We may assume, of course, that between 1928 and 1937 there were no significant changes in this male adult population.

The categories in figure 3 are relatively imprecise and must be treated with caution. That said, the graph has a number of striking features. It was the coolie category that contributed the most to filling the clinic, especially in comparison with the coolies' demographic weight in the total population (6.7% of the population but 16.3% of the patients). Workers were a similar case in point, even if their overrepresentation was far less spectacular (42.7% of the population and 46.5% of the patients). All in all, therefore, manual workers accounted for 62.8% of the smokers in the clinic but only 49.4% of the adult male population.

Peasants also appeared to be overrepresented (0.8% of the population and 4% of the patients). They raise a specific problem because the institute very probably drew some of its patients from outside the Canton conurbation proper, in the immediate vicinity of the city, and this would have artificially increased their numbers.

The case of the merchants is interesting not so much for their percentage among the patients (18.1%), which is almost equivalent to their proportion relative to the total population (17.4%), but because the person who compiled the figures for the institute made a distinction between *shang* (merchants) and *fan* (street vendors), a distinction that did not exist in the 1928 count or for that matter in any other of Canton's other administrative documents for that period. This can be explained by the fact that opium consumption was particularly important among the street vendors (11.9%

<sup>44</sup> GJYN, statistical part, 2.

<sup>45</sup> These results were published in Guangzhoushi zhengfu tongjigu, *Guangzhoushi zhengfu tongji nianjian*, 1929, 53.

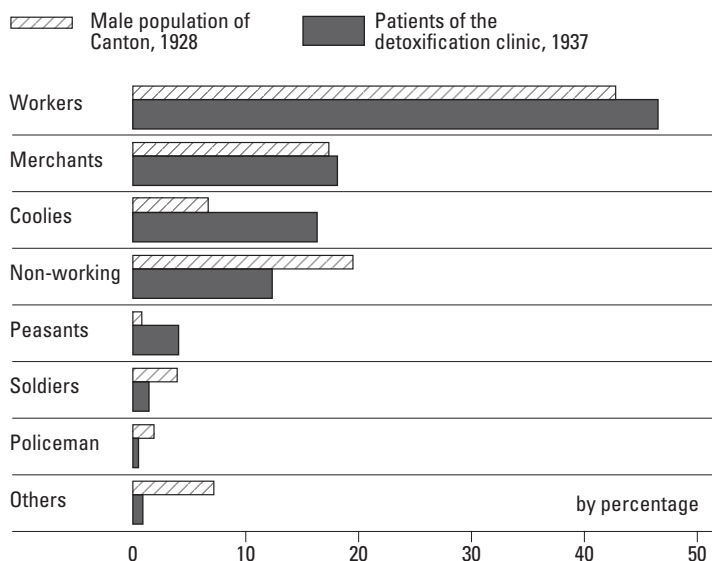


Figure 3. Distribution by Profession of Patients at the Detoxification Clinic in 1937 and of Canton's Adult Male Population in 1928

*Note:* Merchants and hawkers have been placed in the same category to facilitate the comparison with the 1928 census, which does not distinguish between these two groups.

*Sources:* GJYN; Guangzhoushi shizhengfu tongjigu, *Guangzhoushi zhengfu tongji nianjian*.

of the patients in the institute). The magazine *Guangzhou zazhi* dwelt at length on opium consumption among street vendors in an article devoted to this category.<sup>46</sup> In the relationship between the merchants and opium, there was thus a horizontal dividing line or rift between the more well-off merchants and the poorer ones.

The rather flattering picture of soldiers and policemen given by the institute's statistics must be taken with caution, because these categories of people were probably more capable of evading treatment. The case of soldiers will be looked at more closely later in this chapter. The figures for the policemen could reflect the quality of their recruitment and training and also that those of them who did smoke would have enjoyed a degree of impunity. However, any references that can be found to Canton policemen are all full of praise for them.<sup>47</sup> The absence of any mention of a

<sup>46</sup> *Guangzhou zazhi* 30 (1 July 1934): 15.

<sup>47</sup> Two articles on the Canton police in the *China Weekly Review* dated 29 November 1930

proliferation of opium smokers among policemen suggests that they were not much affected by opium consumption.

The clinic gives no details for teachers, civil servants, or professionals, all of whom come under the heading "others," representing only 0.9% of the total number of patients. According to the 1928 count, these three categories respectively accounted for 0.8%, 1.3%, and 0.8% of adult males. These figures suffice to conclude that opium consumption had little hold on these elite categories. This conclusion is confirmed in a report by the French consul in 1932: "civil servants and soldiers as well as students are not given to smoking opium except in exceptional cases."<sup>48</sup> The many rules and regulations that prohibited smoking among teachers, civil servants, and members of the Guomindang throughout this period probably had some effect.<sup>49</sup> Mr. Taishi, the hero of a satirical cartoon strip in the newspaper *Banjiao manhua*, a lazy teacher, womanizer, and opium smoker, was probably not very representative of his profession.<sup>50</sup>

All in all, there seems to have been a clear link between opium consumption and social status: the lower the social level, the greater the proportion of smokers.

This observation might also simply reflect the inability of the poorer classes to evade treatment in the clinic, even if this possibility can be discounted. The total number of nonregistered smokers, 997, arrested by the police between March and June 1937 (roughly during the period of activity covered by the 1937 report by the clinic), is strikingly similar to the total of 988 patients brought by compulsion to the clinic. We must therefore discount the likelihood of any large-scale evasion by the wealthier smokers between the point at which they were arrested and their admission to the clinic.

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and 29 December 1928 give a very favorable impression of the police, as does Yong Sang Ng, *Canton, City of the Rams* (Canton: M. S. Cheung, 1936), 22–23. Praise from the British consul in Canton appears in a summary of confidential reports sent by the consuls in China compiled by the British ambassador in China in the first quarter of 1924, published in Robert Jarman, *China: Political Reports, 1911–1960* (Cambridge Archives Editions, 2001), vol. 3, p. 23. I have found only one case of an opium-smoking policeman in the news: *YHB*, 12 December 1931.

<sup>48</sup> Nantes, Pékin, Série A, file no. 157, report by the French consul in Canton dated 15 December 1932.

<sup>49</sup> *Huaguobao*, 21 October 1914; *Guangdongsheng zhengfu gongbao*, 1 August 1925, 20 June 1926; *Huazi ribao*, 27 July 1928; *GMR*, 20 November 1928, 25 January 1929, 7 October 1929; Guangdong Provincial Archives, series 2/2, file no. 481, provincial government order dated 5 October 1933.

<sup>50</sup> *Banjiao manhua* 6, no. 8 (ca. 1932): 8: in episode 68 of the series, Mr. Taishi smokes opium and then heads out to an amorous assignation, hoping that his sexual performance will have been boosted.



Two other factors could have abnormally weighted the proportion of smokers from the poorer sections. The first was that wealthier individuals were more likely to take out permits to avoid the embarrassment of an arrest and a well-publicized stay in a clinic. The second factor was that the poorer smokers were less likely to smoke at home than the wealthier ones because they had neither the space nor the equipment for it. And it is clear that it was the illegal smokers in the opium houses who were more likely to be caught than those who smoked at home. Still, even if these factors did play a role and lead to overrepresentation of poorer smokers among those who were forced into the clinic, they were compensated for by the definitely high proportion of wealthier individuals among those patients who went to the clinic of their own accord (13.3%). These wealthier individuals had to pay fees not within the means of any ordinary coolie.<sup>51</sup> The director of the clinic complained that he could not take in more than 117 patients per month free of charge, which meant that the clinic was not working to full capacity. There were therefore poorer smokers waiting for free treatment who could not be admitted.<sup>52</sup> All in all, it is possible that the reasons that lead to overrepresentation on either side tended to balance each other out.

It is plausible that the different categories were accurately represented in the population of the clinic. Independently, the concentration of smokers among the poorer categories of the population is confirmed by several other sources: as early as 1925, a report by the British Foreign Office to the League of Nations claimed that smokers were recruited mainly from among chair coolies, rickshaw pullers, and others of the same class.<sup>53</sup> Ten years later, when the province was taken over by the Nanjing authorities, a report made to Jiang Jieshi dated 15 September 1936 said that, in Guangdong, smokers were particularly numerous at the lowest levels of society and that, at these levels, visiting opium houses could be considered an almost habitual practice.<sup>54</sup> According to an article in the *Judu yuekan* in 1929, opium smokers were particularly numerous among the workers in Guangdong.<sup>55</sup> The establishment of a cement factory in a semirural part of Honam soon led to the opening of numerous opium houses in the factory's vicinity in order to meet the demand from its workers.<sup>56</sup> And a letter in March 1937 by the director of the arsenal to the opium prohibition office

<sup>51</sup> GJYN, 47.

<sup>52</sup> GJYN, 3. The clinic could, in theory, receive six hundred patients per month.

<sup>53</sup> FO 228/3369: dated 12 March, this report actually contains a text by the British secret services for April-September 1924 in Canton. This text is in FO 228/3368.

<sup>54</sup> National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), series no. 41, file no. 519.

<sup>55</sup> *Judu yuekan* 36 (December 1929): 47.

<sup>56</sup> *Canton Gazette*, 3 June 1935.

in Canton stated that no fewer than five or six hundred workers of the arsenal were consuming opium.<sup>57</sup>

Seen over the long term and compared with the situation at the end of the Qing, this predominance of the poorest categories of the Canton population probably reflected a decline of the practice among the wealthier classes. Diplomatic sources and missionaries at the end of the empire stressed the universal character of opium consumption and the way in which it pervaded the Canton elites, especially the civil servants.<sup>58</sup> An article in the monthly magazine of the Wesleyan Methodist Church dated July 1911 on the elimination of opium in Zhongshan District (near Canton) mentions that five years earlier the magistrates in that area had almost all been opium smokers.<sup>59</sup>

To be sure, the Ten-Year Plan, which required elites to set an example and prohibited smoking among civil servants,<sup>60</sup> created greater awareness among these elites of the dangers of opium consumption. It fostered the idea that opium was the cause of national decline,<sup>61</sup> and it greatly contributed to turning the Canton elite away from the drug. According to the report by the International Opium Commission in 1909, all those soldiers and civil servants who had been smoking were doing their utmost to stop.<sup>62</sup> A 1912 report by the French ambassador in China said that the decline of opium consumption among the elites was particularly marked in Canton:

While it may be true that the huge fortunes amassed in the South by the opium traffic had made a powerful contribution to revolutionary action, it must be noted that well before last year's events, as early as 1907 and 1908, the imperial government's fight against opium was nowhere better received than in the region's big ports, Fuzhou, Amoy, and above all Canton, precisely by this mercantile and educated population, most ardently imbued with revolutionary ideas.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Letter dated 18 March 1937, *GJWGJ*, 98–99. See also *Canton Gazette*, 21 January 1935.

<sup>58</sup> MAE, Nouvelle série, Sous-série Chine, file no. 650, annual medical report of the Canton station in 1909; Royal Commission on Opium, *Report*, 219–228.

<sup>59</sup> *The Foreign Field*, July 1911, 334.

<sup>60</sup> International Opium Commission, *Report of the International Opium Commission*, 72–76. There are examples of high-level civil servants dismissed because of their opium addiction during the 1906–1911 period: *L'Echo de Chine*, 23 May 1908; report by Hardouin dated 15 December 1907, Aix, GGI 43002.

<sup>61</sup> MAE, Nouvelle série, Sous-série Chine, file no. 587, report by the French consul in Canton dated 13 February 1908; MAE, Nouvelle série, Sous-série Chine, file no. 592, report dated 21 August 1912 from Picot to Poincaré, minister of foreign affairs.

<sup>62</sup> International Opium Commission, *Report of the International Opium Commission*, 72–76.

<sup>63</sup> MAE, Nouvelle série, Sous-série Chine, file no. 592, report dated 21 August 1912 from Picot to Poincaré, minister of foreign affairs.

However, the documents from the decade starting in 1910, a fairly large number of which focus on the penetration of opium consumption into Canton elite circles, are relatively divided as to whether there was a movement away from opium as early as this period. Thus, in 1912, an article titled "A Journey around the Canton Horizon" by a missionary in Canton, M. Gervais, refers to the opium smoker thus: "if the fate of the beggar arouses compassion, how much more should I deplore the condition of the opium smoker! Although he does not, unlike the beggar, know the misfortunes of deprivation, he suffers the disadvantages of wealth that has become the ruin of his existence and his reputation."<sup>64</sup>

For Gervais, the typical smoker in 1912 was always a character from the most privileged categories. In 1910, the British consul in Canton provided food for thought when he wrote:

It may interest you to know that, on the authority of the Farmer, opium smoking in Canton amongst the well-to-do classes has not sensibly diminished, and amongst the lower classes, only on the extent of 50 per cent. The former are willing to pay any price for their favourite drug, and are commencing to hoard opium against the time when total suppression will come into force.<sup>65</sup>

In 1912, Hu Hanmin made it clear in an interview with the *South China Morning Post* that the elites at the beginning of the Republic were still consuming opium on a large scale.<sup>66</sup> The persistence of opium consumption among civil servants in Canton, despite the formal prohibition repeated by successive governments since imperial times, was mentioned again in 1915 and 1916.<sup>67</sup> We can also assume that, because of high opium prices at the beginning of the Republic that restricted consumption by the poorer sections, the proportion of elites among opium smokers did not continue on the downward trend observed at the end of the empire.

By the mid 1930s, however, three factors and their effects become discernible to the historian. These factors, which had been at work over the previous fifteen years, were the drop in opium prices, the eschewing of opium by the elites for ideological reasons, and the propaganda that associated opium consumption with a low social status. This explains the subsequent heavy concentration of opium smokers in the poorest sections.

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<sup>64</sup> M. Gervais, "Voyage autour de l'horizon cantonais," *Les missions catholiques*, 1912, p. 358.

<sup>65</sup> FO 415, report dated 8 June 1910.

<sup>66</sup> SCMP, 24 February 1913 to 1 March 1913.

<sup>67</sup> *Huaguobao*, 23 January 1915; *Tianjin dagongbao*, 15 December 1916.

### Four Social Groups Particularly Concerned by Opium Consumption

One might now suggest that a general social law came into existence under the Republic. Linking social hierarchy with opium consumption, this law would be formulated as follows: the lower the rung on the social ladder, the greater the proportion of opium smokers. However, such a law would be based on a fairly approximate perception overlooking certain categories that had particular affinities with opium, even when they were not at the bottom rung. I choose to look more closely at four social groups that were most frequently presented as being especially partial to opium: rickshaw pullers, soldiers, criminals, and opera actors.

#### *The Rickshaw Pullers*

For Cantonese in the 1930s, the rickshaw puller was the archetype of the coolie. As such, rickshaw pullers drew the spotlight of the political and intellectual elites as well as that of the Canton press. They inspired university research projects, reports, and official enquiries. This is why their living conditions and hence their relationship with opium are relatively well known today.<sup>68</sup>

The strong link between rickshaw pullers and opium consumption is mentioned in several sources, including a Japanese tourist guide in 1941. The author of this work warns his readers against the Canton rickshaw pullers, who were remarkably slow and inefficient because they were for the most part opium smokers.<sup>69</sup>

At the beginning of the 1930s, an inquiry by the municipality covering a group of 5,253 rickshaw pullers confirms the penetration of opium into this category. Of the rickshaw pullers questioned, 18.2% said they were regular smokers (*shihao yapien*).<sup>70</sup> One of the reasons for this particularly high proportion in comparison with the rest of the population is that they used the drug to sustain them in their exhausting job.<sup>71</sup> In an interview in 1991, a former Canton rickshaw puller, Zeng Zhaojin, said that opium, like tobacco or alcohol, procured the illusion of dissipating fatigue.<sup>72</sup> For certain rickshaw pullers, therefore, opium was an indispensable stimulant.

<sup>68</sup> On the great interest shown by writers and sociologists in the rickshaw pullers, see David Strand, *Rickshaw Beijing: City, People, and Politics in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 21–23.

<sup>69</sup> Murayama Shigeru, *Kanton Sadan*, 86–87. On the prevalence of opium consumption among rickshaw pullers, see also *Canton Gazette*, 28 November 1933, and *Judu yuekan* 90 (June 1935): 7.

<sup>70</sup> Guangzhou nianjian bianzuan weiyuanhui, *Guangzhou nianjian*, *shehui* section, 53.

<sup>71</sup> YHB, 5 May 1933.

<sup>72</sup> Chi Ming Fung, "History at the Grassroots: Rickshaw Pullers in the Pearl River Delta of

Another reason for the specific importance of opium consumption among this group is that the entrepreneurs who hired out the vehicles and lodged the rickshaw pullers encouraged them (as we have seen in chapter 5) to consume opium in opium houses set up in the very buildings in which they were housed.<sup>73</sup> The rickshaw pullers were fond of *yantiao*, a very cheap product that was powerful and could be quickly smoked, and therefore was perfectly suited to their needs.<sup>74</sup>

These factors suggest that opium consumption by rickshaw pullers was particularly high, even when compared with consumption by other categories of coolies. It is likely that the 18.2% mentioned was below the actual figure. Still, certain enquiries from this period encourage caution about these figures and suggest that the practice of smoking opium was unequally distributed among the rickshaw pullers, a social group whose apparent homogeneity concealed segmented interests and approaches linked to different geographical origins and accentuated by differences in dialect. An inquiry devoted to rickshaw pullers who were natives of the Huizhou region and lived in Dongdi District mentioned in passing that opium consumption was especially high among rickshaw pullers who were natives of Canton itself.<sup>75</sup> This same inquiry also leads to a better assessment of the impact of opium by emphasizing that alcohol actually was the most frequently used stimulant in this population. The inquiry by the Canton municipality previously mentioned confirms that more than 53% of Canton's rickshaw pullers drank heavily (*shihao jiu*).<sup>76</sup>

### *The Military*

Soldiers were generally reputed to be very partial to opium. Thus, a short article in the *Guangzhou zazhi* in 1933 draws a parallel between foreign officers, all in good health and of imposing appearance, even when not in the prime of youth, and their Chinese counterparts ravaged by excessive opium consumption who became stooped, walked with a shuffle, and took on a sickly hue once they passed thirty.<sup>77</sup>

There were many outcries in Canton against excessive opium consumption by the military, especially when the city was occupied by troops

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South China, 1874–1992," Ph.D. thesis, University of Hong Kong, 1996, 180.

<sup>73</sup> XGR, 25 February 1935.

<sup>74</sup> YHB, 25 June 1933, 10 April 1934.

<sup>75</sup> XGR, 16 March 1936.

<sup>76</sup> Guangzhou nianjian bianzuan weiyuanhui, *Guangzhou nianjian*, *shehui* section, 53. Interestingly, alcohol consumption seems to have concerned more generally all manual workers. According to an inquiry made in the same period, in a sample of 311 workers, 84 drank heavily: Yu Qizhong, *Guangzhou gongrenjiating zhi yanjiu*, 65.

<sup>77</sup> *Guangzhou zazhi* 18 (15 August 1933): 4–5.

foreign to the province. Under Long Jiguang (1913–1916), there were several reports on the same theme. One of them by the Maritime Customs estimated that more than 30 percent of Long's men (natives of Yunnan like himself) smoked opium and that their conduct "left much to be desired,"<sup>78</sup> an opinion repeated two years later by the British consul in Canton.<sup>79</sup> Various news items confirmed the judgment of these two observers.<sup>80</sup>

The other two periods for which there are references, albeit less abundant, to notorious opium consumption among the military in Canton were also periods when powerful armies from other provinces were stationed in the city: these were firstly the period of domination by Lu Rongting (1916–1920) and secondly the 1923–1925 period, when the troops of Yang Ximin and Liu Zhenhuan led the motley pack assembled by Sun Yat-sen in Canton to drive out Chen Jiongming.<sup>81</sup>

The accusations of opium consumption were leveled above all against soldiers from the opium-producing provinces, with Yunnan at the top of the list. By their behavior, the successive waves of troops from Yunnan stationed in Canton confirmed their nationwide reputation as great lovers of opium.<sup>82</sup> A report by one of the leaders of the New Guangxi Clique, Huang Shaohong, stated that troops from Yunnan and Guizhou in the early days of the Republic were distinguished by the presence in their ranks of numerous opium smokers, whereas the percentage was far lower among the Guangxi troops.<sup>83</sup> The specific fondness of soldiers from Yunnan and Guizhou for opium can be explained by the fact that opium consumption was generally more widespread in their provinces than in Canton. Opium indeed cost very little in these two provinces and was used extensively as a remedy for malaria, which was endemic. The Guomindang was probably less capable of repressing opium consumption among these troops over which it had very little control. It is tempting to draw a sharp distinction between "warlord"-type soldiers who were natives of the opium-producing provinces, on the one hand, and Cantonese troops on the other.

<sup>78</sup> National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), series no. 679, file no. 32385-32399, correspondence received from Canton, 27 August 1913.

<sup>79</sup> FO 228/2461, report by the consul in Canton to Jordan dated 23 April 1915.

<sup>80</sup> *Huaguobao*, 10 December 1913, 27 October 1914.

<sup>81</sup> FO 228/3360, report dated 17 January 1920 by the consul in Canton to the Embassy; National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), series no. 679, file no. 32411, Canton Current Events and Rumors (1918), 13 July 1918, and file 32412, Canton Current Events and Rumors (1919), 17 January 1919; *Bulletin of the International Anti-Opium Association*, May 1923.

<sup>82</sup> Diana Lary, *Warlord Soldiers: Chinese Common Soldiers, 1911–1937* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 40.

<sup>83</sup> Huang Shaohong, "Xinguixi yu yapian" [The New Guangxi Clique and opium], in Li Bingxin et al., *Jindai Zhongguo yandu xiezhen*, 1:572.

However, this opposition between Cantonese troops and troops from other provinces must be qualified. The Russian military counselor Chereparov makes no reference whatsoever in his memoirs to the influence of opium on the troops (including those from Yunnan) that made up the Guomindang forces in the mid-1920s. The fact that he refers to other discipline-sapping practices such as visits to prostitutes, gambling, and alcohol consumption suggests that the picture was overblown even for troops from outside the provinces.<sup>84</sup>

Moreover, opium also had a place among the Guomindang's Cantonese troops.<sup>85</sup> General Mo Xiong, in his memoirs, writes that opium consumption was not only widespread but also accepted among the high-ranking officers of the Canton Army. Mo recounts an event to which he assigns no date (although it probably took place between 1923 and 1925) when he paid a private visit in Jiang Jieshi's company to Xu Chongzhi (chief of staff of the Canton troops, no less). On reaching the general's home, they found him busy smoking opium. Xu welcomed them without much fuss, asked them to make themselves at home, and continued to smoke before them. Mo gives a witty account of Jiang Jieshi's ludicrous inability, before Xu, to shake off his stiff demeanor of a model subordinate.<sup>86</sup> This anecdote reveals the state of mind of Xu Chongzhi, who took no trouble to hide his opium consumption from his subordinates.<sup>87</sup> Interestingly, Mo Xiong's narrative reflects no astonishment or indignation about his superior's opium consumption.

These are a few pointers suggesting that, on the subject of opium consumption, the differences between troops foreign to the province and Cantonese troops should not be exaggerated. However, it must be noted that, after 1925 (which marked the end of any substantial presence of extra-provincial troops in Canton), the subject of opium smoking among soldiers disappeared both from the press and from the diplomatic reports. The very flattering figures from the 1937 clinic (1.4% of the patients were soldiers, whereas they accounted for 3.9% of adult males in the city) were therefore probably consistent with reality.

### *Actors of the Cantonese Opera*

The theme of the opium-smoking opera actor has a considerable place in a number of famous literary works. For the progressive writers of the

<sup>84</sup> A. I. Chereparov, *As Military Adviser in China*, trans. Sergei Sosinsky (Moscow: Progress, 1982), 222.

<sup>85</sup> GMR, 22 April 1924, 26 August 1924.

<sup>86</sup> Mo Xiong, *Mo Xiong huiyilu*, 58.

<sup>87</sup> Xu Chongzhi's partiality for opium was widely known: *Huaxing sanribao*, 1 June 1927; *Lunyu* 35 (February 1934): 567.



Republican period, this type of character was the perfect incarnation of the old society, combining an art deemed to be retrograde with a practice equally considered to represent the "old China."<sup>88</sup>

The numerous press reports on opium-related affairs concerning opera actors give the impression that this profession was actually particularly affected by opium.<sup>89</sup> Some articles explicitly mention the notorious frequency of opium consumption among Cantonese opera actors.<sup>90</sup> An objection might be that opium consumption was more newsworthy in the case of an opera actor than the man in the street and hence more likely to be reported. However, neither the tone of the press articles, which were not particularly scandalized, nor the very nature of this profession appear to warrant taking any special interest in opium-smoking opera actors. The actors in question were not particularly famous, and their names were often not even mentioned. Occasionally, the report might say that the individual concerned was unemployed and therefore unable to procure supplies of his drug.<sup>91</sup> To be sure, little is known about the Canton opera actors as a social group, and it would be risky to conclude that the high proportion of smokers in this category was based solely on an impression conveyed by the press. However, Virgil Ho, relying on the press and on firsthand accounts by actors, confirms the predominance of opium consumption in their ranks, supporting his case with the argument that the actors needed opium as a stimulant in order to better cope with the repeated, night-long performances dictated by their calling.<sup>92</sup>

The case of the actors suggests that certain social groups could appropriate opium consumption as an element around which they could build a collective identity. Roger Darrobers proposes this approach in a study on the Peking opera where he notes that excess consumption of opium was very frequent in operatic circles and that in certain cases it could even be interpreted as a manifestation of a superhuman essence.<sup>93</sup> That the study of the relationship between opium and building a collective identity as a social group is an avenue worth exploring can be seen in the case of the criminals.

<sup>88</sup> See the character of Zhang Bixiu in Ba Jin's novel *Autumn*, or the hero of Lao She's short story "The Opera Lover."

<sup>89</sup> *Minguo ribao*, 8 April 1921; *YHB*, 10 September 1930, 16 August and 22 October 1931, 17 January 1932, 26 July and 28 September 1933, 25 May 1934, 2 March 1936.

<sup>90</sup> *YHB*, 21 October 1934, 25 May 1934.

<sup>91</sup> *YHB*, 26 July 1933, 25 May 1934.

<sup>92</sup> Ho, *Understanding Canton*, 114 and 134.

<sup>93</sup> Roger Darrobers, *L'opéra de Pékin, théâtre, et société à la fin de l'empire sino-mandchou* [The Peking opera, theater, and society at the end of the Sino-Manchu Empire] (Paris: Bleu de Chine, 1998), 295.

*The Criminals*

The imprecise term “criminals,” used here for want of a better word, covers a whole range of individuals from outlaws and petty, occasional delinquents to the established bosses of the criminal underworld.

We have already seen that novels about criminals made extensive reference to opium consumption and to visits to opium houses. They almost always depicted members of the underworld as opium smokers. Still, the question remains as to whether opium smoking was truly a distinctive feature of the criminal: Du Yuesheng, the famous leader of the Green Gang in Shanghai, was a notorious opium smoker, but can he be taken as a representative example of the penetration of opium smoking into the underworld?

We may recall that the news items in the Canton newspapers echoed images from literature and gave the impression that certain opium houses were dens of brigands.<sup>94</sup> During a vast police operation conducted against a secret society in 1924, a number of the society’s leaders were nabbed in opium houses.<sup>95</sup> According to a Chinese Christian captured by bandits between Canton and Hong Kong in the mid 1920s and held prisoner for five months, his guards were frequently under the influence of opium.<sup>96</sup>

Besides, it goes without saying that incarceration was a relatively normal and habitual stage in the life of a criminal. Now, the subject of opium consumption in prisons surprisingly crops up not only in novels but also in news magazines and newspapers. It was present under the late Qing in Canton news publications such as the *Shishi huabao*.<sup>97</sup> Thereafter, the ubiquity of opium in prisons is continuously attested to: in February 1913, the newspaper *Yangcheng* reported that prison inmates were smoking even in their cells.<sup>98</sup> An article in the *Guangzhou shehui zazhi* in 1923 refers to a prison where the corrupt guards found a major additional source of income: supplying inmates with opium. So great was consumption in the prisons that, according to this article, many inmates who had not smoked before came out of jail as opium addicts.<sup>99</sup> Two articles in the *Guangzhou zazhi* in the 1930s mention guards who supplied opium to addicted inmates.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>94</sup> *Huazi ribao*, 8 December 1917; *YHB*, 17 January 1932, 22 September 1933; *Canton Gazette*, 12 July 1924, 5 July 1934; *GMR*, 26 June 1924, 20 April 1934.

<sup>95</sup> *GMR*, 4 August 1924.

<sup>96</sup> *The Foreign Field*, December 1924, 70, and January 1925, 100.

<sup>97</sup> *Shishi huabao*, no. 6, April 1907, p. 13a; an article in the *Shenbao* dated 24 January 1911 also reported the presence of opium in Canton’s prison cells.

<sup>98</sup> *Yangcheng*, 17 February 1913.

<sup>99</sup> *Guangzhou shehui zazhi* [Canton social journal] 1 (January 1923): 13.

<sup>100</sup> *Guangzhou zazhi* 12 (1 May 1933): 17–18, and 25 (15 March 1934): 11.

However, the simple observation that the prisons were full of opium smokers is not enough to establish any deep penetration of opium into criminal circles: indeed, this phenomenon of opium trafficking and consumption in prison could have arisen from two distinct causes. First, as Frank Dikötter points out, individuals who had infringed the law on opium constituted a major proportion of the inmates in the various jails that he has studied.<sup>101</sup> Jan Francis Kiely, for his part, has looked at the problems caused in Jiangsu by the huge influx of prisoners arrested for offenses under the new anti-opium laws.<sup>102</sup> This can therefore very clearly explain why these individuals, mainly clandestine smokers who did not actually belong to the criminal world, arrived in prison in a state of dependency and sought to procure supplies of the narcotic during their stay in prison. The fact, however, is that in Canton, few prison sentences were handed down for opium-related offenses apart from certain specific periods, such as from 1920 to 1922 when special efforts were made against opium consumption. Unlike in the prisons of Jiangsu at the beginning of 1930s, opium-related crimes did not represent a significant portion of offenses.<sup>103</sup>

The numerous references made to opium consumption in prisons probably reflect the fact that the “normal” inmates of the prisons, namely, the underworld, were particularly affected by opium consumption.

There are therefore good reasons to believe that opium consumption was a characteristic feature of criminals in Canton under the Republic. This phenomenon, however, remains to be explained. One anti-opium source claims that opium-smoking bandits in the Chaozhou region used the drug to stay awake at night, which was when they usually conducted their activities.<sup>104</sup> There is also the logic of collective identity. In a society dominated by an anti-opium discourse, the conspicuous consumption of opium was probably equivalent to asserting and even claiming a marginal status.<sup>105</sup>

<sup>101</sup> Frank Dikötter, *Crime, Punishment, and the Prison in Modern China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 77, 84, 97, 265.

<sup>102</sup> Jan Francis Kiely, “Making Good Citizens: The Reformation of Prisoners in China’s First Modern Prisons, 1907–1937,” Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2001, 527–542.

<sup>103</sup> Li Zonghua, *Mofan zhi Guangzhoushi*, 113; *Guangzhou nianjian bianzuan weiyuanhui, Guangzhou nianjian, gongan* part 108, *sifa* part 2.

<sup>104</sup> A Mu, “Jinyan yaogaozai Chaomei” [Cure for opium in the Chaomei region], in Tao Kangde, *Yapian zhi jinxi*, 69.

<sup>105</sup> An analogy can be drawn with the world of show business in France between the wars. Emmanuelle Retaillaud-Bajac attributes the fondness for drugs in these circles to a desire to explicitly mark their separation from the bourgeois lifestyle: “Usages et usagers de drogues dans la France de l’Entre-deux-guerres (1916–39)” [Uses and users of drugs in France between the wars (1916–39)], Ph.D. thesis, University of Orléans, 2000, 238–239.

Beyond the necessary generalizations, the four examples studied here clearly show the impact of opium consumption on Canton society in all its complexity and especially the major presence of the drug in certain segments of society that did not necessarily include the most underprivileged.

### Conclusion: The Social Impact of Opium

The view that opium was a social scourge relies on two postulates: first, that a large number of individuals smoked, and second, that a significant proportion (if not the majority) of these individuals consumed this narcotic so much so that their health and their material conditions of life were thereby seriously impaired. At the end of my study of the population of opium smokers, I can say that in Canton, the first condition was not fulfilled, since regular smokers (essentially men in the prime of their lives) formed only a small minority, about 3 to 4 percent, of the city's population.

We have seen, however, that the majority of the smokers came from the lowest social strata (they were coolies, workers, and carriers), rickshaw pullers being the archetype of these sections. It is quite possible that opium wrought havoc in families on precarious budgets.

However, the average amounts of opium consumed were fairly small, and it could well be that the majority of the smokers were not dependent. We must also recall that there were cheaper alternatives to officially sold opium that limited the financial impact on the family budget. Hence, even if the smokers formed a relatively small-sized cohort, opium consumption in all likelihood did not have a major effect on this group except in a small proportion of cases.

The conclusion that the social impact of opium was fairly limited is confirmed when we look at the problem from the opposite angle, that is, if we take individuals in distress as our starting point and ask whether their condition had, to any significant extent, been caused by opium consumption. There are two particularly valuable sources of information here.

First, there is a 1929 report on the Canton municipal shelter for destitutes. This report by a civil servant takes a close look at those inmates of this shelter who were stated to be in the prime of their lives and able-bodied. The report asks why they had been reduced to beggary. He found that no fewer than half of these cases could be explained by venereal disease, contracted through contact with prostitutes, that had rendered them unfit for work. Unemployment (*shiye*), which affected mainly demobilized soldiers and small traders, accounted for 20 percent of these cases. Only 20 percent had landed in the shelter as a result of gambling or opium consumption.<sup>106</sup> Even though this typology is clearly unsatisfactory, it is

<sup>106</sup> *Guangzhoushi pinmin jiaoyangyuan tekan* [Special volume on the Canton municipal shel-

likely that only about a tenth of the destitute were in this shelter because of opium consumption. Opium does not seem to have been an essential cause of impoverishment.

This impression is confirmed with even greater clarity in an inquiry made at the beginning of the 1930s on 186 families who were customers of a pawnshop.<sup>107</sup> The six identified causes of indebtedness were: unemployment (65 cases), ill-health (51 cases), death and bereavement (34 cases), man-made or natural disasters (13 cases), gambling debts (12 cases), and other "other debts" (11 cases). Opium was buried in the last category ("other debts"), which represented only 5.9% of the total. Its influence therefore could only have been marginal.

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People could be ruined by opium in Canton under the Republic. This is an obvious fact, and in any case the press itself was voluble enough to convince anybody of it.<sup>108</sup> That said, I must emphasize that the number of such cases was very certainly limited, and it would be quite an exaggeration to see opium as a scourge having a major impact on the society of the time.

In any case, these examples of ruin caused by opium, so capable of touching the collective imagination and which the adversaries of opium brandished and presented as the norm, could only reinforce the impact of the image of the miserable smoker. Here lies one of the crucial points of this study. In the previous chapter we saw that the confrontation between the pro-opium and anti-opium battalions went heavily in favor of the latter. In the end, it was the population of smokers itself that served as the benchmark. Inasmuch as this population corresponded in the main to the lowest layers of the social pyramid, it confirmed the almost total success of the anti-opium discourse and especially the success of its project to associate opium with poverty.

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ter for destitutes] (Canton, 1929), 30–33. The remaining 10 percent were attributed to other nonspecified causes.

<sup>107</sup> Fu Gonggan, *Diandanglun* [On the pawnshops] (Shanghai, 1936), 45, cited in Eric Trombert, "Monts de piété et maisons de prêt sur gage dans la Chine républicaine" [Public and private pawnshops in Republican China], Ph.D. thesis, EHESS, 1977, 144.

<sup>108</sup> A Japanese source also refers to opium as one of the main causes of beggary in Canton: Nishi Seiun, *Kanton hyakudai*, 78.



# Conclusion

Although the Ten-Year Plan of 1906 led to a sharp reduction in opium consumption, the fall of the empire ushered in a period of revival for the narcotic, as the disappearance of central authority now impeded the application of a nationwide policy of prohibition. The ensuing “regionalization” of opium policies only meant that opium became a legalized and lucrative source of treasure for the warlords who emerged from the mid-1910s onward.

The new political context in which opium made its return was marked by two additional and novel characteristics. First, since late-Qing diplomacy had reduced opium imports from India to very low levels, it was now the producing provinces in the interior that supplied low-priced opium to the great consumption centers in the coastal cities. Second, the appearance of modern, convenient-to-use drugs (such as morphine and heroin) opened up new possibilities for many consumers.

This revival of opium that began in the mid-1910s could not have been studied at the pan-China level. Not only was the time not ripe for such an endeavor, but it would not have been matched by the currently available sources. That is why this work has taken the form of an urban monograph.

Seeking as it does to deal with the opium question in all its facets, this study is based on the idea that the supply side (embodied in the opium policies of various administrations) and the demand side (consumption) must complement and shed light on each other.

I shall therefore return to my findings in these two areas and then determine the extent to which my conclusions on opium in Canton can be applied to the national situation.

## The Supply Side

Other studies have demonstrated the importance of opium in the process of China’s political fragmentation and then in the Guomindang’s



enterprise of national reunification. In Canton, opium was no less important to the political regimes that followed one another from 1912 to 1936. Left almost entirely to their own devices by the impotence of central authority after 1915, these different administrations had to define the status that they would grant the drug. Their approaches ranged from extremely strict prohibition to intensive exploitation of the drug for the bounty that it yielded.

Broadly speaking, there were two phases. The years from 1912 to 1923 saw increasing laxity toward prohibition, albeit with a number of twists and turns. Then, after 1923, opium became permanently legal. This timeline sets Canton apart from the rest of the country in two ways. First, Canton led the country in relaxing prohibition. By 1915, Long Jiguang was already setting up the Republic's first official system for selling opium. At the opposite end of the spectrum, Chen Jiongming (like Yan Xishan in Shanxi)<sup>1</sup> made a last-ditch attempt between 1920 and 1923 to impose absolute prohibition—thereby reaching for the impossible goal of keeping control of a much-prized province while renouncing an invaluable source of revenue.

It has been shown here that, contrary to appearances, the periods when opium was prohibited were not those under supposedly progressive regimes hostile, in principle, to opium (like the revolutionaries in 1912 and 1913 and the Guomindang from 1920 to 1929). The best example here is the way in which an official opium monopoly was set up from 1923 onward and made more efficient during the second half of the 1920s when the Guomindang was running Canton and Guangdong Province. Similarly, the coming to power of a warlord would not necessarily lead to any hasty legalization of opium consumption. A very typical example is that of the militarists of the Old Guangxi Clique (in power between 1916 and 1920), who neither wished nor dared to put any official stamp on the opium circuits and under whom consumption seems to have remained at a fairly modest level.

The period studied in this book opened with a major offensive by the Qing authorities against opium. During the Ten-Year Plan, the imperial government relied greatly on Canton's elites to lead the fight against opium consumption. Propaganda, assistance with detoxification, and certain surveillance tasks were taken over, with the governor's blessings, by a Guangdong Anti-Opium Association.

The fall of the empire did not result in an end to all resolute and consistent political action against opium in Canton. Some individuals in power between 1912 and 1923 did undertake a genuine fight against opium

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<sup>1</sup> Ma Mozhen, *Dupin zai Zhongguo*, 133–141.

consumption. Still, while the goal remained the same, the struggle was no longer organized in the same way. When Canton's political authorities decided on a systematic approach to the fight against opium (in the 1912–1913 and 1920–1923 periods), they took a rather different approach. Rather than using persuasion and encouraging the elites to set a good example—the credo that had underpinned the imperial strategy—they now favored repression backed up by more robust measures. The periods of grace within which smokers had to give up their habit were reduced. Hu Hanmin's revolutionary government waited only one year before decreeing total prohibition in January 1913. Increasingly, the authorities became directly involved in the struggle while the anti-opium associations organized by notables clearly lagged behind. Here was a new mode of governance that emphasized direct links between citizens and the political authority that assumed the task of modeling society with only one motto: progress. This can be seen not only in anti-opium policy but also in action against prostitution or for the promotion of hygiene.<sup>2</sup>

The key year of 1923 was marked by the long-term legalization of opium, now that Chen Jiongming's final experiment with total prohibition had made it clear once and for all that it would be suicidal to relinquish opium as a fiscal resource. At the same time, neither before nor after 1923 did the authorities legalize new drugs such as morphine and heroin. Rejection of any compromise on this point remained a constant in official policy until the Japanese occupation.

From 1923 onward, every group that came to power strove by trial and error to find modes of organizing the opium circuit that would maximize revenues, paying special attention to achieving the optimum balance between maintaining direct control over the opium trade and farming it out. In 1925 and 1926, Song Ziwen managed to take advantage of the subjugation by the Guomindang of its main warlord allies and its total conquest of Guangdong Province to establish a compromise that, in a nutshell, enshrined the principle of *guandu shangban* ("officials supervise and merchants manage"). This combined approach was made possible by massive recourse to sales quotas at different levels in the circuit—those of the wholesalers who imported raw opium from neighboring provinces, the merchants to whom the transportation of raw opium was farmed out, the boilers and vendors in specified regions, and the opium houses. These various agents were penalized if they did not sell their quotas within a stipulated period. This device embodied a pragmatic attitude to fraud that Song tried to tame rather than eliminate. It encouraged each merchant to make every possible effort to attain or exceed his quota. While sales that

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<sup>2</sup> Tsin, *Nation, Governance, and Modernity*, 10–15.

exceeded the fateful threshold earned the merchant certain additional, legally sanctioned advantages, he was able, above all, to cheat the system by mixing legal opium with smuggled opium. The possibility of committing fraud was thus intelligently converted into an incentive that drove the system.

This organization of circuits was put in place as of 1926 and thereafter saw only relatively minor adjustments. It led to a spectacular increase in opium revenues. Even if it is very difficult to make any strictly accurate estimates, opium thereafter accounted for a very major part of government revenues.

That said, the opium question cannot be reduced to an unbridled and brazen search for maximum profit. It is easy to belittle the numerous opium eradication policies that were never applied and the sophisticated plans that were forgotten no sooner than published, not to mention convoluted euphemisms such as “detoxification salons” and “opium addiction remedies” that were invented to designate opium houses and opium. These derisory stratagems that appeared whenever opium was being lawfully sold reflect an inescapable reality: legalization, for anyone who applied it, entailed a significant cost in terms of unpopularity in Guangdong itself. It was a handicap in the race for legitimacy between rival centers of power seeking to win over not only Chinese but also international public opinion. Thus, between 1931 and 1936, opium revenues did greatly sustain Chen Jitang’s power, enabling him to support an armed force, the only guarantor of his independence, and maintain his grip over a web of loyalties that he spun around himself. At the same time, these revenues contributed greatly to discrediting his authority in the face of Nanjing, which, as of 1935, began to publicize the progress it was making in its Six-Year Plan.

This explains why the authorities, while trying to obtain the maximum revenues, not only did nothing to discourage the dissemination of anti-opium propaganda, but matched their opium-legalizing policies with an anti-opium discourse of their own. And, they often strove to limit opium consumption to what were deemed to be acceptable bounds.

Thus, despite concrete policies much to the contrary, there was an official anti-opium rhetoric that thrived throughout the Republican period, both in Canton and in the rest of the country. The regulations that defined the operation of the official opium circuits were preceded by solemn professions of faith against the drug. Anti-opium demonstrations were organized by the authorities at times when opium was being sold quite freely in Canton and when every schoolboy was being taught about how foreigners had introduced the terrible poison of opium, despite Lin Zexu and his heroic action.

As for keeping opium consumption within bounds, the various Canton authorities showed not the least inclination to restrict access to the drug to certain categories of the population. The permits that were put into circulation actually served only to achieve greater control over home consumption by permit holders. Their policies were meant above all to make opium as *invisible* as possible. Restrictive measures affected mainly the opium houses, which were sometimes purely and simply prohibited, and at other times relegated to Honam, more or less on the periphery of the city. In other periods, the authorities only prohibited these establishments from being set up in the busiest avenues. There were also regulations to prevent opium houses from advertising their attractions in the press.

Such actions, to be sure, did not meet the demands of the progressive sections of the population, but the authorities did display, if not a guilty conscience, at least some consideration for the idea that taking opium was a shameful and harmful practice. In permitting and even adopting the anti-opium rhetoric as their own, the authorities contributed to a process in which opium became a fringe activity.

That the consequences of this situation cannot be downplayed has been seen in the “demand” section of this study.

### The Demand Side

The study of the supply side and its conclusions has put opium consumption in Canton in perspective, and it is the latter that will fill a major gap in the historiography of opium in China. As for the social impact of opium, the reality should be distinguished from the discourse so as to clear away a few stubborn myths that have come straight out of the most hostile anti-opium propaganda. There is no question here of trying to deny that opium consumption wreaked havoc on the health of a significant number of individuals, nor that it sometimes was a heavy burden on the budget of entire families. Opium was truly present in Canton, and it remained an indissociable element of daily life in the years 1910–1930.

However, there is a huge contrast between the gloomy tirades of anti-opium militants against the ravages of opium and the proven reality of its impact. Indeed, when the pieces of the puzzle that emerge in the different parts of this book are joined, they form a rather reassuring picture.

Let us return once again to the mid-1930s, for which I have the most information. We may recall that the comparison of the results of the 1936–1937 count with various other estimates gave a figure of 30,000 to 40,000 (more probably the latter) as the most credible number of regular smokers in Canton.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See chapter 7.

As we have seen,<sup>4</sup> the average number of habitual smokers per opium house was about one hundred.<sup>5</sup> Now, the number of opium houses was in the region of 350 in the first half of the 1930s. Given that home consumption was probably a relatively marginal phenomenon, this number of opium houses corroborates the estimate of 30,000 to 40,000 smokers ( $100 \times 350 = 35,000$ ).

Again, if we look at our own estimates, based on other sources, of quantities of *yangao* consumed per month in Canton (4.4 to 9 tonnes of prepared opium),<sup>6</sup> and assuming that there were 40,000 smokers and each of them consumed an average of 4.2 grams per day,<sup>7</sup> we are still within the 4.4–9 tonne bracket, that is, with a total of 5 tonnes per month ( $40,000 \times 30 \times 4.2 = 5,040,000$  grams, or 5 tonnes).

This figure of 40,000 therefore appears to be well confirmed when we cross-check the estimates from the different parts of this book. This means that smokers amounted to less than 4% of Canton's total population—certainly a rather modest figure when compared with a conservative estimate of 15% for the 1890s. The significant drop in the number of smokers that soon followed the 1906 Plan does not seem to have been greatly reversed over the next thirty years. One sign of the plan's success was the disappearance of the custom of welcoming visitors by offering them opium. While the practice was still frequent at the end of the nineteenth century, it disappeared under the Republic for the very reason that consumption had generally diminished. Another manifestation of this drop in consumption was that certain public places such as restaurants and teahouses stopped offering opium on their bills of fare.

Not only did smokers form a small proportion of the population, but not all of them were addicted to their habit. This is by no means surprising given the fairly widespread and shared belief among smokers that consumption was appropriate so long as it remained below the threshold of dependency. It was in fact easier for smokers to follow these wise precepts because, while *yangao* in the 1920s and 1930s was distinctly cheaper than in the 1910s, official opium continued to be a highly taxed commodity and its regular consumption would have weighed heavily on any modest budget. Even if alternatives did exist, for example, *yantiao* and smuggled opium, the plausible figure for average daily consumption (around 4 grams)

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<sup>4</sup> See chapter 5.

<sup>5</sup> When the Guomindang authorities tried to reorganize the supply to the opium houses in April 1937, they based their estimate on a customer base of about a hundred consumers on average per opium house.

<sup>6</sup> See chapter 1.

<sup>7</sup> This estimate corresponds to the average consumption declared by the patients of the detoxification institute in 1937 and is discussed in chapter 7.

is low enough to suggest that a major proportion of opium aficionados were quite occasional smokers.

As for the descriptions of dark, repulsively filthy smoking dens, frequented mainly by criminal types, they do not at all correspond to the reality of a diversified supply. The opium houses could be classified under three categories: first, there were rudimentary *yantiao* smoking dens, visited by poor people. These places could well correspond to the cliché image and formed a contrast with a second category, the upmarket opium houses that occupied several floors and provided a wealthier set of customers with quality opium in luxury surroundings. Between these two extremes came a third category, the neighborhood opium houses where customers would smoke regular opium (and not *yantiao*). These places were visited by a fairly mixed clientele.

Smokers, by their own admission, hugely appreciated these opium houses as true places of sociability where they could chat and relax. Well-heeled customers found ways to display their wealth by spending large sums of money for the use of famous pipes and superior opium. They could obtain the services of young women (the *yanhua*) who would prepare their pipes. They could also avail themselves of other pleasures such as snacks, high-quality teas, listening to radio broadcasts, and massages. In all likelihood, therefore, it was precisely the fact that the opium houses were pleasant and not particularly dangerous spaces that drew the wrath of the anti-opium groups. With the pleasures that they offered, and especially the presence of the *yanhua*, the opium houses were capable of luring even nonsmoking customers. Besides, one of the reasons given by the anti-opium press to explain the large numbers in the opium houses was that, along with the brothels and gambling parlors, these were among the few places of leisure accessible to the people of Canton.

The concentration of opium houses in certain neighborhoods, especially Honam, to the south of the Pearl River, explains a form of presentation commonly found in the anti-opium literature on Canton: this was the standard account of a visit to Honam, haven of all vices. The specific concentration of opium houses in Honam was a fact from the mid-1920s onward, and the presence of gambling dens also contributed to a somewhat shady reputation. However, with a probable figure of 350 opium houses (for one million inhabitants), the Canton space as a whole was far from being invaded by these establishments, even though we must remember that the city's main thoroughfares did shelter clandestine establishments in numbers that are difficult to establish. Besides, opium was consumed quite lawfully in places such as brothels, clubs, and hotels. And certain smokers, for a variety of reasons, preferred to smoke at home.

The accusations leveled against opium smoking included lamentations over the fate of wealthy scions, forced by their relatives to smoke opium so that they would stay at home and not waste away family fortunes, especially by gambling. Such cases no doubt did exist, but they must be placed in a broader context, and especially looked at against the backdrop of the very marked lack of interest in opium among the Canton elites and among youth in general (despite alarmist articles in magazines that embellished the theme of the rise in consumption among youth). The reason that people started smoking can rarely be found in these strange forms of manipulation by families. Smokers began to consume opium either for relaxation or to relieve physical pain or, in the case of manual workers such as rickshaw pullers, to cope with exhausting labor.

Separating reality from the anti-opium discourse does not mean merely putting them in opposition to each other in some static fashion. In this case, on the contrary, we need to perceive the dynamic relationship in which they interacted. And we need to see how the shaming/marginalizing process in which they were bound together also characterizes the social dimension of this study.

The official discourse that associated China's state of national submission with the consumption of opium by a majority of its population and that linked foreign imperialism to the penetration of opium made no small contribution to turning the population away from the drug. However, it is likely that the greatest impact was from this genuine "system of pejoration" that was applied to the opium smokers themselves, above all through propaganda images. The smoker in these illustrations was easily identifiable especially because of the characteristic paraphernalia associated with opium consumption and the skeleton-like scrawniness that made him a genuine "skull-man." As such, his image served all the better, in the anti-opium illustrations, as an aid to the enterprise of stigmatizing smokers by associating them with poverty and extreme physical deterioration. The success of this system of representation can be seen from the fact that it was reproduced well beyond publications specializing in anti-opium propaganda. It is certain that the image of the scrawny, poverty-stricken smoker even became a cliché under the Republic. Harboring a death blow to the image of the smoker, this very cliché might help explain why the elites turned away from opium during the period under study. Faced with the idea that opium consumption was associated with poverty, members of the privileged social classes tended to abstain from it, further contributing to the process by which the population of smokers acquired the characteristics assigned to it by public opinion. Through this dialectical process, the belief in the association between opium and poverty became reinforced. The myth of the



poverty-stricken smoker was sustained by real transformation in the population of smokers.

It is worth noting that, beyond the disaffection of the elites, the social physiognomy of the smokers as a group actually followed a general law in which the lower the social rung, the greater the proportion of smokers. Thus, the merchants as a social group were polarized between, on the one hand, the shopkeepers who were relatively comfortable and unconcerned by opium and, on the other hand, the hawkers and street vendors, large numbers of whom were smokers. Considerations of social rank apart, opium consumption was concentrated in certain sections of the population, generally males and people of ripe age. Women were about seven times less likely to smoke than men—a consequence of the widely prevalent view that it was more heinous for a woman to smoke opium. The reasoning behind this state of affairs was also strictly economic: regular consumption of opium was a major burden on the budget of a poor family. Many coolies took to opium as a means of coping with their exhausting trade, and since it is they who were the family breadwinners, their wives necessarily took second place in the allocation of such pleasures.

The 25–45 age group represented about three-quarters of the smokers and, by the end of the 1930s, the under-25s were clearly moving away from the narcotic. The remarkable lack of receptivity by youth to opium seems to confirm that it became not very “smart” to smoke.

The genuine disaffection for opium among the privileged does not warrant its being seen as part of an inevitable, “natural” process in which the drug, after having won over the wealthy, was supplanted in these wealthier circles by more modern drugs, persisting thereafter only among its most recent enthusiasts, the poverty-stricken. While new practices of consumption do generally tend to penetrate human societies “from the top,” it is equally true that the abandonment of these forms of consumption by the elites is by no means inevitable. There are numerous examples of practices that can spread through every level of population without in any way being relinquished by the privileged classes. China under the late Qing is one example of a society in which tobacco was smoked at every level while its use in the form of snuff, associated with a more refined apparatus, remained specifically attached to the elites.<sup>8</sup> The fact is that most practices of consumption contain a “potential for sophistication” upon which the elites can play in order to keep themselves apart from the masses.

Opium lent itself particularly well to this phenomenon. Under the Republic, the choice of certain brands (like those of the Hong Kong monopoly) and the use of special modes of consumption continued to “create

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<sup>8</sup> Lucie Olivova, “Tobacco Smoking in Qing China,” *Asia Major* 18, no. 1 (2005): 229–239.

distinction" just as the practice of taking opium itself had done at the beginning of the nineteenth century. A close reading of the sources also indicates that the smokers of the Republican period themselves used a persistent and fairly elaborate discourse that sought to attach value to opium by extolling the sophistication of the ritual, the pleasures of taking opium in groups, and the value of human relationships among opium enthusiasts. This discourse was above all underpinned by the view that the pleasures of opium did not necessarily lead to dependency and that one could always be a "reasonable" consumer. Such views could have also ensured the continued prevalence of opium consumption among the elites if only the "system of pejoration" had not been so triumphant.

### **Canton as a Possible Model**

This study has been limited to one large Chinese city. The question that remains is whether it has any significance at the national level.

To put it briefly, the "Canton model" places two contradictions face to face in the 1906–1936 period. The first contradiction is characterized by the opposition between a context, on the supply side, that was generally favorable to the revival of consumption (thanks to policies to maximize sales, an abundant supply of opium, and low prices), and the fact that consumption stayed at levels well below those of the late nineteenth century. The primary cause of this surprising situation was a masterpiece of propaganda—the successful stigmatizing of opium, especially through the triumph of the "skull-man" metaphor. Now, this contradiction itself can be explained by another fundamental contradiction whereby the authorities faced with anti-opium militancy adopted attitudes that ranged from benign indifference to unmistakable support even when they were benefiting on a large scale from their opium revenues. This meant that the anti-opium discourse could continue unabated throughout the period under study and so penetrate society in depth.

Even if the period of the Japanese occupation and the years 1945–1949 are outside the chronological bounds of this study, all indications are that the situation hardly changed. The basic facts, and especially official attitudes, remained unchanged.<sup>9</sup> Wang Jingwei's collaborationist government repeated the usual anti-opium refrain and also opened a detoxification clinic. At the same time, money from legal sales of opium poured into his coffers. And when the Guomindang returned to Canton in 1945, it was far too cash-strapped in the circumstances of the Civil War to even consider doing without opium.

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<sup>9</sup> The only difference, which must not be overlooked, is that synthetic drugs were sold freely under the Japanese occupation.

There is a singular lack of data on the social aspects during the war years.<sup>10</sup> A close look at the 1945–1949 period, however, leaves the impression that opium continued to occupy a fairly limited place in society. An interesting document from 1946, claiming to be an uncensored and undiluted portrait of Canton's woes, makes no mention whatsoever of opium.<sup>11</sup> In 1951, the census of smokers led to the registration of only about five thousand individuals.<sup>12</sup> This figure tallies with Virgil Ho's observation that there are no grounds for believing that the Communists, at the beginning of the 1950s, inherited a grim situation where drugs were concerned.<sup>13</sup>

The case of Canton, therefore, suggests that opium consumption, which returned in force after the fall of the empire, no longer had the features that had characterized it at the end of the nineteenth century. The Republican period was one when opium exerted a far weaker hold over society, a period that did not see any return to the pre-1906 situation.<sup>14</sup>

Although only further research can confirm this point, it would not be excessively bold to assume that this basic trend, in which opium consumption was relegated to the fringes through the methods that we have seen, was probably duplicated in China's other main cities. The 1906–1912 campaign brought equally successful results in these other cities. Throughout the period under study, the population was subjected to comparable doses of enthusiastic anti-opium propaganda on school benches, in the press, and in campaigns organized by officials and anti-opium activists. Statistical data from other big cities suggests that the ageing and impoverishment

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<sup>10</sup> An estimate by Portuguese Consul Morgado of the number of opium houses in Canton at the beginning of 1939 put the figure at barely 115: Mo Jiadu (Morgado), *Cong Guangzhou toushi zhanzheng* [The war seen from Canton] (Shanghai: Shanghai shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 2000), 240. We must keep in mind, however, that Canton's population was substantially reduced with the arrival of the Japanese.

<sup>11</sup> Wu Jian, *Guangzhou neimu* [The hidden side of Canton] (N.p.: n.p., 1946). There is a particularly interesting list (p. 24) of the *ershi duo* (literally, "20-many") woes that beset Canton. These included clandestine prostitutes, mah-jongg gaming, unemployed persons, bad roads, beggars, domestic and other refuse, taxes and levies, petitions, and so on but did not mention opium.

<sup>12</sup> Archives of Guangdong Province, series 206/1, file no. 36, report dated 15 January 1952 on the suppression of drugs and opium.

<sup>13</sup> Ho, *Understanding Canton*, 97–98.

<sup>14</sup> The hypothesis that opium consumption had begun to drop before the Ten-Year Plan cannot be completely ruled out and will perhaps be confirmed in future research. However, it would be reasonable to say that even if a reduction did occur, its scale cannot be compared with what happened under the plan itself.

of the population of smokers occurred in the same proportions as in Canton.<sup>15</sup>

However, in these other cities as in Canton, the fact is that the opposition faced by the prohibitionists was all the smaller as the special interests they were dealing with were weaker than in the poppy-growing areas in China's interior. There, as more generally in the countryside, the situation was probably different, and we can surmise that the anti-opium movement arrived somewhat belatedly in those places.

That said, the main objection to extending the validity of the "Canton model" is that Canton was particularly open to foreign influences because of its special links with overseas Chinese and Hong Kong, which contributed to making it a singular place, even among the great Chinese cities. Such an objection does not appear to be warranted. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Canton elites were effectively in the forefront of the anti-opium movement. Under the Republic, however, Canton fell behind Shanghai. It was in Shanghai that the headquarters of the NAOA, the main anti-opium organization of the Republican period, was set up in 1924. We have seen that Canton then displayed remarkable apathy toward the movement led by the NAOA. It seems, therefore, that we must discard the notion of a city that stood out by virtue of its singular progress in activism and in the penetration of anti-opium ideas.

Canton's true originality under the Republic probably lay in its pronounced impermeability to new drugs. Given our interest in the degree of penetration of these substances, this specificity of Canton deserves a closer look. What was the reason for this effective barrier against the new drugs that were being used increasingly in other cities of comparable importance? The answer is to be found not in any intransigence by the authorities against these new drugs, or in an abundance of opium at affordable prices, but essentially in the availability of an extremely cheap substitute product, *yantiao*. To be sure, the consumption of dross by coolies was a nationwide phenomenon, and yet its scale is very poorly known. The decision to legalize *yantiao* in Canton seems to have been the key to the problem. It was the lawful existence of a powerfully effective, easy-to-use, and low-cost drug that stood in the way of these synthetic drugs,

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<sup>15</sup> This is suggested by the figures from the detoxification clinics that opened in Peking and Shanghai in the mid-1930s: Beipingshi zhengfu mishuchu diyike tongjigu, *Beipingshi tongji lanyao* [Statistical summary for Peking city] (Peking, 1936), 85; CWR, 3 April 1937; *Jinyan zhuankan* 1 (June 1936). The same observation emerges from data on people questioned in relation to opium-related offenses (the overwhelming majority was for cases of illicit consumption) in Qingdao and Nanjing in 1930 and 1931: *Jinyan weiyuanhui gongbao* [Official bulletin of the Opium Suppression Office] 7 (July 1931), 9 (September 1931), 11 (November 1931).

which after all had the same characteristics. The case of Canton, and this is not the least that can be said on the subject, clearly shows that the substitution of new drugs for opium, which is what happened especially in northern China, was not inevitable. The historian needs to examine this process more closely, placing it squarely in the context of a social study of drug consumption.

The fact that the findings for Canton seem to correspond to a basic nationwide trend, and that any notion of a radical change in the situation between 1937 and 1949 must be ruled out as improbable, places the rapid success of the Communists' post-1949 anti-opium policy in a new perspective. This success is usually explained by political factors alone, to wit, the reunification of China, the disappearance of the foreign settlements, efficient action by the party, and the active support of the masses.<sup>16</sup> The reason that the ultimate goal of eliminating drugs was very swiftly attained between 1950 and 1952 is, without doubt, that the Communist authorities had new means of control and propaganda, especially public trials and mass demonstrations, developed during the Three Anti and Five Anti Campaigns.

But, by then, the fruit was ripe and ready to be plucked. The social group of opium smokers, stigmatized and forming a very small minority, were recruited essentially from the poorest sections and were all the less capable of resisting the force of Communist action.

It was therefore 1906 that sounded the death knell of opium with the inauguration of a policy of combating the drug, a policy that, by common agreement among historians, produced remarkable results. The present study suggests not only that the blows struck in that time against opium were decisive but also that their impact was lasting and even irreversible. Even if a highly propitious political context led to a revival of consumption after 1915, opium under the Republic continued to live on borrowed time until the Communists' coup de grace at the beginning of the 1950s.

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<sup>16</sup> Wang Hongbin, *Jindu shijian*, 478–490; Su Zhiliang, *Zhongguo dupin shi*, 466–471.



# Biographies

## **Chen Jiongming (1878–1933)**

Chen Jiongming was born into a family of Hakka landowners in eastern Guangdong and became a member of the provincial assembly in October 1909. A significant figure in the anti-Manchu uprising in Guangdong at the end of 1911, he also played a frontline role in the revolutionary government that emerged in November of that year. The fall of the revolutionary government in the summer of 1913 forced him into exile. After returning to China, he controlled the southern part of Fujian Province between 1918 and 1920. In November 1920, his armies expelled the Old Guangxi Clique from Canton and Guangdong Province, where he was then sharing power with Sun Yat-sen. The two men had differing goals: Chen was above all concerned with the development of the province, while Sun Yat-sen's absolute priority was to reunify China. In the inevitable break that came about in June 1922, Sun was forced to flee Canton. Some months later came Chen's turn to be chased out, by a coalition of troops loyal to Sun Yat-sen. He withdrew with his armies into eastern Guangdong. In October 1925, Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek) put an end to the threat that he still represented to the Guomintang. Chen played no significant political role in the remaining years of his life.

## **Chen Jitang (1890–1954)**

Chen Jitang was born into a Hakka family in southwestern Guangdong and became an early member of the Tongmenghui (United League, founded in October 1905), which he joined in 1907. From an initially subordinate role, he rose through the ranks of the Guomintang's Canton troops during the first half of the 1920s. During the Northern Expedition (*Beifa*), he became one of the top-ranking officers of the troops stationed in Guangdong. The disgrace into which his superior Li Jishen fell in 1929 propelled Chen into the role of chief commander of the Guomintang's military forces in



Guangdong. Initially loyal to the central authority in Nanjing, Chen took advantage of a crisis of discontent against Jiang Jieshi among a number of the Guomindang's top leaders to secure a degree of autonomy for his province. Under his rule, the quasi-independent province of Guangdong enjoyed five years of peace and prosperity. In July 1936, Chen's principal aide, along with his air force, defected to the central government and forced him into exile into Europe. He later came back into Jiang Jieshi's favor and was given senior responsibilities during the war.

### **Hu Hanmin (1879–1936)**

Born in Canton into a scholarly family, Hu Hanmin received a classical education. In the 1900s, Hu distinguished himself by engaging in intense anti-Manchu and revolutionary activity in both Tokyo (where he made several sojourns) and Canton. Hu, along with Sun Yat-sen, Liao Zhongkai, and Wang Jingwei, was one of the tiny circle of leading lights of the Tongmenghui. The success of the revolutionary uprising in November 1911 propelled Hu into the position of Guangdong's military governor. Within the Guomindang itself, Hu Hanmin was Sun Yat-sen's second-in-command jointly with Wang Jingwei and took part in the successive governments set up by Sun Yat-sen in Canton. Soon after Sun's death in March 1925, Hu Hanmin, who was the leader of the right wing in the Guomindang, appeared well set to succeed him as leader of the party. Accusations that Hu had engineered the assassination of his rival, Liao Zhongkai, on 30 August 1925 greatly weakened his political influence. Even though Hu had regained a role in the Guomindang by 1927, he was unable to stand up to Jiang Jieshi's personal power. His arrest, ordered by the latter in February 1931, provoked opposition from the party's main leaders. On being released, Hu went to Hong Kong, where he remained until his premature death in 1936. While in Hong Kong, Hu Hanmin offered moral support to Chen Jitang's government without, however, taking any direct part in it.

### **Huo Zhiting (1877–1939)**

Huo Zhiting was born into a Cantonese family of modest means and started his working life in a number of manual trades. By the final years of the empire, he was managing a steel mill. Having come on the scene during Long Jiguang's spell in power (1913–1916), Huo became a virtually irremovable presence behind every successive Cantonese government, taking out franchises on gambling activities and strengthening his grip on the opium-distribution circuits. The influence wielded by Huo Zhiting, who amassed immense wealth and acquired Portuguese citizenship in

1918, reached its peak during the five years of Chen Jitang's government from 1931 to 1936. This was a time when Huo was the chief boss of the gambling and opium circuits and maintained close links with the Canton authorities while resolutely remaining in the background. His activities extended over a wide variety of fields: banking, cement factories, weaving mills, sugar factories, and so on.

### **Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek; 1887–1975)**

Jiang Jieshi was a native of Zhejiang Province and received military training in Japan, where he formed ties with the revolutionary Chen Qimei and joined the Tongmenghui. The two men fought in Shanghai during the 1911 Revolution. Jiang thereafter joined the struggle against Yuan Shikai, in China and also from Japan. On 29 June 1922, Jiang joined Sun Yat-sen on the gunboat where the latter had taken refuge after being chased out of Canton by Chen Jiongming. The two men very quickly formed a close relationship, and the years that followed brought Jiang major responsibilities, including especially that of commandant of the Whampoa (Huangpu) Military Academy in 1924. After Sun Yat-sen's death, Jiang used the army to quell his rivals within the Guomindang, and he became the strong man of the government established in Nanjing. Jiang Jieshi was defeated by the Communists in 1949 and took refuge with his supporters on the island of Taiwan, which he governed until his death.

### **Li Fulin (1874–1952)**

Li Fulin was born in Canton and spent his youth as an outlaw in the Pearl River Delta. It was during a stay in Southeast Asia that Li met Sun Yat-sen and joined the Tongmenghui in 1907. Li Fulin was also linked to a number of secret societies and took part in the 1911 Revolution in Canton. It was from this time onward that he became the long-standing boss of Honam, a large island in the delta in Canton City's southern suburbs. There, he earned the nickname of "King of Honam." Li helped the Guomindang take control of Guangdong Province in 1920 and occupied various official positions in subsequent years (he was mayor of Canton in 1924). Li Fulin belonged to the Guomindang right wing. Support from his troops proved to be crucial in putting down a revolt by Liu Zhenhuan and Yang Ximin in May 1935. Li's participation in the suppression of the Canton commune (11–13 December 1927) was his last major military feat. He withdrew to Hong Kong in the following year and thereafter had only honorific functions within the Guomindang.

**Li Jishen (1886–1959)**

Li Jishen was born into a wealthy family in Wuzhou (Guangxi) and enlisted in the revolutionary armies in Jiangsu in 1911. Between 1921 and 1926, Li took part in the various campaigns of the Guomindang Army based in Guangdong. When the Northern Expedition began, he became commander of the troops stationed in Guangdong and also governor of the province. In the years that followed, Li Jishen's star continued to rise within the Guomindang apparatus until he was arrested in Nanjing, having been accused of supporting a rebellion by the Guangxi military leaders in March 1929. Released in 1931, Li took part in a rebellion by Fujian Province in 1933 but then re-joined the government when war broke out against Japan.

**Lin Zexu (1785–1850)**

Although not living during the period under study, Lin Zexu is an unavoidable reference on the subject of opium in Canton under the Republic. Lin Zexu was a native of Fujian and obtained the highest grade in the imperial exams (*jinsshi*) in 1811. His brilliant administrative career took him in 1837 to the position of governor-general of the two "Hu's," the provinces of Hubei and Hunan. Shortly thereafter, the Daoguang Emperor initiated a debate among the administrative elites on the policy to be adopted toward opium. Lin argued in favor of total prohibition. Favorably impressed by Lin's memorial on this subject, the emperor dispatched him with full authority to Canton, which was the center of the opium traffic and the main focus of opium consumption. Lin acted vigorously, forcing the foreign merchants to deliver their stocks of opium, which he then proceeded to destroy in their entirety in June 1839. This gesture led to the First Opium War (1839–1842), in which China was defeated. Lin Zexu was disgraced and condemned to exile but nevertheless returned to high positions by 1846. He was about to return to a leading role in the empire when he died in 1850.

**Liu Zhenhuan (1890–1972)**

Liu Zhenhuan, a member of the Tongmenghui, took part in the 1911 Revolution. The failure of the revolt against Yuan Shikai in 1913 forced him into exile. In 1915, Liu returned to his native Guangxi to take part in the uprising of the southern provinces. Having become a war leader, Liu joined Sun Yat-sen's armies in January 1923 in their attempt to dislodge Chen Jiongming and was wounded in the fighting. His attempt, with the leader of the Yunnan troops, Yang Ximin, to overthrow the Guomindang government in May 1925 ended in failure.

**Long Jiguang (1860–1921)**

Long Jiguang, a native of Yunnan Province, came to prominence when he put down a revolutionary uprising in Guangxi Province in 1907. After the fall of the dynasty, Long Jiguang remained in Guangxi with his army. In the summer of 1913, Long was ordered by Yuan Shikai to march against the government of Guangdong, which was then in revolt. Upon establishing his control over the province, Long strove thereafter to put down revolutionary activism. In May 1915, through loyalty to Yuan Shikai and despite the unpopularity of his stance, Long backed acceptance of Japan's Twenty-One Demands. However, Yuan Shikai's increasing isolation and the fact that the revolt in the southern provinces was moving apace encouraged him to declare Guangdong independent in April 1916. He then invited the revolutionary leaders to a conference near Canton on 12 April but engineered the assassination of anyone unwise enough to attend the event. In the days that followed, Long tried to pin blame for the crime on Yuan Shikai's envoy, Cai Naihuang, whom he soon executed in turn. After Yuan Shikai's death, Long Jiguang was forced to give way to the Old Guangxi Clique and withdrew in October 1916 with some of his troops to Hainan Island. In December 1917, Long Jiguang tried to return to Guangdong, but this move ended in the total elimination of his military potential and his disappearance from the political chessboard.

**Lu Rongting (1856–1927)**

Lu Rongting was a native of Guangxi and a former brigand who joined the imperial army with his men in 1904 and took part subsequently in the suppression of several revolutionary uprisings. After the revolution, Lu Rongting emerged as one of the strongmen of Guangxi Province. Having initially vowed fidelity to Yuan Shikai's central government, Lu moved away from this stance in 1916 and declared the province's independence on 15 March. After the death of Yuan Shikai, Lu Rongting, who was the leader of the Old Guangxi Clique, became master of the two Guangs. He was chased out of Guangdong in the summer of 1920 by the armies of Chen Jiongming and withdrew with the rest of his troops to Guangxi. A year later, the Guomindang troops destroyed his army and took control of the province of Guangxi.

**Song Ziwen (1894–1971)**

Song Ziwen was born in Shanghai into an extremely wealthy family of Cantonese origin with revolutionary connections (in 1914, Sun Yat-sen married Song's sister Song Qingling). Song Ziwen studied in the United States at Harvard and Columbia, obtaining a Ph.D. in economics. After his

return to China in 1917, he was a director of several companies. From 1923 onward, he took charge of a vast undertaking for the rationalization and reorganization of the finances of the Guomindang government in Canton. Thereafter, he served several times as minister of finance and member of the main institutions of the Guomindang. Song Ziwen cultivated support among industrial and financial circles and became a major personality in the Nanjing regime despite ups and downs in his relationship with Jiang Jieshi, who married another of Song's sisters (Song Meiling) in 1927. Song Ziwen was the main architect of the modernization of the Chinese financial system in the 1930s, a process marked by the abandonment of the tael as a unit of currency.

### **Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925)**

Sun Yat-sen was educated in Hawai'i and Hong Kong, where he obtained a degree in medicine in 1892. In the mid-1890s, Sun started traveling around the world to propagate his revolutionary and anti-Manchu views among overseas Chinese communities. It was in Tokyo, which had become the headquarters of the revolutionaries, that he founded the Tongmenghui (on 20 August 1905) and took part in the organization of several uprisings in southern China. As a major figure of the revolutionary movement, Sun Yat-sen was elected in December 1911 as president of the Chinese Republic by an assembly of delegates of provinces in revolt against the dynasty. However, in February 1912, Sun resigned and yielded his position to Yuan Shikai—a price he had to pay in order to win the support of a man still capable of coming to the rescue of the failing dynasty. From 1916 onward, as the country became divided among powerful warlords, Sun Yat-sen strove for reunification under the Guomindang. Sun was initially disillusioned when, despite his title of "Grand Marshal," he found himself unable to play any major role in Guangdong Province, then under Lu Rongting (1917–1918). He managed to regain a foothold in Guangdong in 1920 (forming the second Canton government under his leadership) and undertook preparations for the Northern Expedition, but came up against Chen Jiongming, who was more interested in developing the province. Chased out of Guangdong in June 1922, he got his revenge some months later when he again became master of Canton (in February 1923, when he formed his third government). Benefitting thereafter from Soviet assistance, Sun Yat-sen strove to consolidate his Guangdong base and accelerate preparations for the Northern Expedition but died in March 1925 before he could see his dream come true.

**Yang Ximin (1886–1967)**

Yang Ximin took up a career as a soldier at the beginning of the Republican period. By the beginning of the 1920s, he was one of Yunnan's major warlords, and his troops were part of the coalition that Sun Yat-sen used to drive Chen Jiongming out of Canton in January 1923. In the next two years, although theoretically under Sun Yat-sen's orders, Yang Ximin retained a great deal of freedom, especially in organizing the opium traffic in the areas occupied by his troops. Hoping to take advantage of a move by a major part of the Guomindang's armies against Chen Jiongming in eastern Guangdong, Yang Ximin formed an alliance with the leader of the Guangxi troops, Liu Zhenhuan, to overthrow the revolutionary government on May 1925. The failure of this attempt resulted in a consolidation of the Guomindang's power base in Guangdong.





# Sources and Bibliography

## Sources

### *Note on the Sources*

The historian wishing to do full justice to the consumption side of his story and sketch a complete picture of the smokers in their daily lives is hamstrung by the absence of what should have been his El Dorado—the judicial and police archives. Yet one resource remains—the press. Canton, like every other great Chinese metropolis of this period, had a wide range of dailies and periodicals, of which it was the *Yuehuabao* that appeared to be the best candidate for systematic and intensive use. Founded in August 1927, the *Yuehuabao* soon became one of Canton's main daily newspapers, with a circulation of fourteen thousand in 1929.<sup>1</sup> As a popular, lightweight, scandal-oriented daily with a penchant for fairly trivial anecdotes, it was thoroughly despised by the progressive elites. However, it had the inestimable advantage of reflecting the daily life of the smokers in its most ordinary aspects. A systematic count of all its articles on opium consumption between 1927 and 1936 yielded an abundant trove of more than 350 items that can be divided into three categories: news briefs, in-depth articles, and readers' accounts.

The news briefs, by far the most numerous, are not fundamentally different from their counterparts in other parts of the world<sup>2</sup>—they are generally fairly brief accounts of minor events that broke the monotony

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<sup>1</sup> Liang Qunqiu, *Guangzhou baoye*, 114–116; Guangzhoushi zhengfu tongjigu, *Guangzhoushi zhengfu tongji nianjian*, 340. The currently preserved collections of this newspaper are very spotty for the 1927–1930 period. However, remarkably complete series are available for the 1930–1936 period.

<sup>2</sup> For a masterly account of the differences between news briefs in the *Shenbao* and those published in Western newspapers of the same period (an observation generally valid for the *Yuehuabao* also), see Barbara Mittler, *A Newspaper for China? Power, Identity, and Change in Shanghai's News Media, 1872–1912* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 84–102.

of daily life in the city (public disorders, accidents, various events). Of these items, those relating to opium consumption typically recount cases of theft, swindling, and brawls in the opium houses. Their dry tone notwithstanding, these accounts are often rich sources of information.

The in-depth articles are almost invariably advocacies against the use of opium. They often contain collections of supposedly nonsensical myths prevalent among smokers, which, although compiled by anti-opium writers (both journalists and readers), are of interest.

There are also firsthand reports by readers recounting certain personal experiences, most frequently visits to opium houses.

These 350 articles, often very revealing when read singly, are even more informative as a coherent whole. Thus, the *Yuehuabao's* reports on brawls in opium houses unfailingly give the exact times at which these incidents took place—information not vital in itself but, when looked at in its totality, shows that the brawls in question were particularly frequent after the midday meal (12 A.M.–2 P.M., corresponding to the afternoon nap) and the evening meal (6 P.M.–8 P.M.), which, as it happened, were “peak hours” for these establishments. One repeatedly played-out scenario at these times was that of the smoker desperate for his fix who would arrive at the opium house and, finding the place full, would have to wait his turn at a couch. The ensuing state of irritability would lead him, on one pretext or another, to provoke a quarrel. Another interesting detail emerges from these news briefs: it was precisely at peak hours, when the clandestine opium houses were full of customers, that the police would choose to make their raids.<sup>3</sup>

More fodder for my investigation into the “social practices” of smokers came from other Canton newspapers, though far less intensively, either because the collections are very limited (especially for the 1906–1922 period) or because their inability to provide detailed information on the life of the smokers becomes apparent from a glance through a few samples.

In addition to the Canton newspapers, the research scholar has the singular advantage of being able to use the Chinese-language press of Hong Kong, which enjoyed far greater freedom in dealing with the opium question in Canton and published several very interesting investigations on the subject.<sup>4</sup>

And then there are the articles published in the national magazines (*Judu yuekan*, *Jinyan banyuekan*) specializing in the anti-opium struggle,

<sup>3</sup> YHB, 12 June 1930, 16 February, 1 November, and 18 November 1931, 29 September 1933, 11 January, 25 May, and 28 July 1934, and 4 February and 2 March 1936.

<sup>4</sup> Two newspapers stand out for the wealth of information that they give on the opium situation in Canton in the 1930s: the *Xianggang gongshang ribao* (Hong Kong industry and commerce daily) and the *Xunhuan ribao* (Universal circulating herald).

some of which provide valuable information on the situation in Canton, not to mention individual articles in the more general magazines, both national, like the *Renjianshi* and *China Weekly Review*, and Cantonese, such as the *Haizhu xingqi huabao* and the *Guangzhou zazhi*.

The documents produced in 1936 and 1937 by the Canton City Opium Suppression Office (*Guangzhoushi jinyan weiyuanhui*), created after the return of Guomindang rule to Guangdong, and its counterpart, the Guangdong Province Opium Suppression Office (*Guangdongsheng jinyan weiyuanhui*), provide very precious information on the population of opium smokers, as do the census of smokers taken in 1936/1937 and the annual report of a detoxification institute opened in 1937. Another institute created by the puppet government in January 1941 published an equally interesting report.<sup>5</sup>

Again, a few documents gleaned from the French and British diplomatic archives contain interesting details, as do various accounts by Chinese, Japanese, and Western eyewitnesses and travelers. Literary works by Cantonese writers such as Ouyang Shan and Zhang Ziping have also been used but on their own terms as reflecting the uncompromising hostility of the progressive intellectual elite toward opium consumption. Studies by Chinese sociologists at the beginning of the 1930s on certain sections of Canton society (rickshaw pullers, Tankas, manual workers) provide information on the place occupied by opium in their lives. Finally, an oral history inquiry based on accounts by surviving individuals from the period provides an interesting counterpoint to the mass of written sources, even if the requisite critical approach to the subject is already buttressed by seven years' research into these written sources, indispensable and sufficient in themselves.

For the political aspect of this study, it was the French diplomatic archives (the archives of the Foreign Affairs Ministry, and those of the Indochina government), the British diplomatic archives (the Foreign Office and Colonial Office archives), and those of the League of Nations that were most useful.<sup>6</sup> The Chinese Maritime Customs and the Hong Kong Cus-

<sup>5</sup> *Guangzhoushi jinyan weiyuanhui, Guangzhoushi jinyan weiyuanhui gongzuo jiyao* [GJWG; Summary of activities of the Canton City Opium Suppression Office] (Canton, 1937); *Guangzhoushi jinyan weiyuanhui, Guangzhoushi jieyan yiyuan nianbao* [GJYN; Annual report of the detoxification clinic of Canton] (Canton, 1937); *Guangdongsheng jinyan weiyuanhui, Guangdong jinyan jikan, diyi qi* [GJJ; Quarterly report on opium elimination in Guangdong, vol. 1] (Canton, 1937); *Guangdong jinyan liuyisuo, Guangdong jinyanliuyisuo chengli yi zhou nian jinian tekan* [Special edition to commemorate the first anniversary of the founding of the Guangdong detoxification institute] (Canton, 1942).

<sup>6</sup> The League of Nations combated traffic in opium and narcotics starting with the creation of the Consultative Opium Commission in May 1921. The league sent an inquiry commission to the Far East in 1929 and 1930 in order to study the situation and make recommendations

toms departments too produced reports that shed some light especially on opium smuggling and transportation.

The Canton press, especially the renowned *Guangzhou minguo ribao*,<sup>7</sup> the Hong Kong press, and the *Judu yuekan*, as well as other more general newspapers also provide interesting information, especially when they report the various changes that took place in the opium administration.

One handicap that this range of sources has not been able to overcome is that of the total absence of archives from the different opium administrations and opium farm systems in Canton that came to light during my searches in the National Archives No. 2 in Nanjing, the archives of the Canton municipality, and those of Guangdong Province. These resources contain only a few isolated documents of little interest.<sup>8</sup> This very inconvenient gap has forced me to fall back on the *wenshi ziliao* (historical and cultural materials).<sup>9</sup> These firsthand reports must be approached with extreme prudence.<sup>10</sup> However, inasmuch as they include narratives by former staff members of the opium authorities and opium farm systems, they provide glimpses into the internal functioning of these bodies. The other official documents available on this subject deal essentially with standards and norms<sup>11</sup>—of which vast numbers were promulgated but few even began to be applied.<sup>12</sup> Above all, the balance of forces that underlay the numerous changes in the successive opium authorities are still very difficult to decipher. As for political control, there can be no letting up of an attitude of the most extreme prudence when dealing with such periods of documentary penury.

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for the Bangkok opium conference (November 1930). The archives of this commission can be found mainly in file S196 in the League of Nations archives held in Geneva.

<sup>7</sup> These two newspapers generally did not give local news briefs but detailed accounts of political news.

<sup>8</sup> The only major exception was a detailed written report on the opium situation in Guangdong dated 15 September 1936 and addressed to Jiang Jieshi. This report is in the National Archives No. 2 (Nanjing), series no. 41, file no. 519.

<sup>9</sup> The *wenshi ziliao* are firsthand accounts by eyewitnesses from the pre-Communist period, compiled in China from the beginning of the 1960s. They were published by official organizations in huge compendiums.

<sup>10</sup> The two main *wenshi ziliao* that I have used are by former civil servants in the opium administration: Ye Shaohua, "Guangzhou jinyan quanli," 112–117; Chen Dayou, "Yijiuierliu zhi yijiusansi," 118–131.

<sup>11</sup> Many of them are to be found in the very useful compilation of sources edited by Ma Mozhen, *Zhongguo jindu shi ziliao*.

<sup>12</sup> The 1928–1930 period especially was characterized by major legislative activity in the province. In September 1928, strict prohibition laws, designed to ban opium from the following year onward, were adopted at the national level. These fine-sounding regulations were reflected in the Guangdong press too but not applied in the province any more than they were elsewhere in the country.

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- China Weekly Review*, Shanghai.
- China Year Book*, Shanghai.
- Chinese Repository*, Canton.
- Dagongbao* 大公報 (L'impartial), Tianjin.
- Dianshizhai huabao* 點石齋畫報 [Dianshi illustrated journal], Shanghai.



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- Guangdong gongbao* 廣東公報 [Guangdong official gazette], Canton.
- Guangdong qunbao* 廣東羣報 [The Guangdong masses], Canton.
- Guangzhou minguo ribao* 廣州民國日報 [Canton democratic republican daily], Canton.
- Guangzhou shehui zazhi* 廣州社會雜誌 [Canton social review], Canton.
- Guangzhou zazhi* 廣州雜誌 [Canton review], Canton.
- Guangzhoushi shizheng gongbao* 廣州市市政公報 [Official gazette of the Canton municipal government], Canton.
- Haizhu xingqi huabao* 海珠星期畫報 [Haizhu illustrated weekly], Canton.
- Huaguobao* 華國報 [The country daily], Canton.
- Huaxing sanribao* 華星三日報 [China star], Canton.
- Huazi ribao* 華字日報 [The Chinese mail], Hong Kong.
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- Lunyu* 論語 [Analects], Shanghai.
- Lüxing zazhi* 旅行雜誌 [Travel magazine], Shanghai.
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- Opium Cultivation and Traffic in China*, Peking.
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- Piaopiao* 飄飄 [Waves], Canton.
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*South China Morning Post*, Hong Kong.  
*The China Christian Year Book*, Shanghai.  
*The Chinese Recorder*, Shanghai.  
*The Chronicle of the London Missionary Society*, London.  
*The Foreign Field*, London.  
*Tuhua ribao* 圖畫日報 [The illustrated daily], Shanghai.  
*Wuxian manhua* 五仙漫話 [The five immortals], Canton.  
*Xianggang gongshang ribao* 香港工商日報 [Hong Kong industry and commerce daily], Hong Kong.  
*Xunhuan ribao* 循環日報 [Universal circulating herald], Hong Kong.  
*Yangchengbao* 羊城報 [City of rams], Canton.  
*Yuefeng* 粵風 [Winds of Guangdong], Canton.  
*Yuehuabao* 越華報 [The Southern], Canton.  
*Yugong sanrikan* 羽公三日刊 [Yugong semiweekly], Canton/Foshan.  
*Yuzhoufeng banyuekan* 宇宙風半月刊 [The wind of the universe], Hong Kong.  
*Zhongguo yanhua nianjian* 中國煙禍年鑒 [Yearbook on the ravages of opium smoking], Shanghai.  
*Zhujiang xingqi huabao* 珠江星期畫報 [The illustrated Pearl River weekly], Canton.

### Interviews

- Two of my interviewees asked not to be named.  
 Mr. Liu Ming 劉明, born in 1922, interviewed on 5 October 2005 in Lyons.  
 Mrs. Huang Caijuan 黃彩娟, born in 1931, interviewed on 7 July 2006 in Canton.  
 Mrs. Long Jin 龍勤, born in 1926, interviewed on 10 July 2006 in Canton.  
 Mrs. X, born in 1924, interviewed on 11 July 2006 in Canton.  
 Mrs. Y, born in 1933, interviewed on 11 July 2006 in Conghua (Guangdong).  
 Mr. Mai Zhaoshen 麥兆深, born in 1925, interviewed on 15 and 18 July 2008 in Canton.

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